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ENTERED AT THE POST OFFICE AT NEW YORK, N. Y., AT SECOND CLASS MAIL RATES.

Vol. XXVI.

Published Every
Wednesday.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,

98 WILLIAM STREET, N. Y., March 25, 1885.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$5.00 a Year.

No. 335



THE TWO MEN, THUS STRANGELY UNITED, WERE WALKING TOWARD THE
NORTHERN CONFINES OF THE GOLD CAMP.

OR, The Blades of Bowie Bar.

A Story of the Gold Lands.

BY CAPTAIN H. HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "HERCULES GOLDSBUR," "BROAD-
CLOTH BURT," "CALIFORNIA CLAUDE," ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE BANISHMENT.

"STAND back thar an' let the doomed galoots
pass on!"

"All right! off they ar', Windy. Three cheers
for ther victory ov justice in Nugget City!"

Fifty dark-faced men in mining shirts took off
their hats and waited for the man who had
spoken last to begin the cheers.

"No!" said the stalwart fellow designated as
Windy, throwing up his hands. "Send 'em to
the mountains without a yell. Remember, men
ov Nugget, thet they war once our pards."

"Once! God save the mark!" flashed one of
two men who stood lashed together so that es-
cape without assistance was utterly impossible.
"May I forget thet I war once a citizen ov Nug-
get City!"

"Hush! Lonely Jack," said his companion in a mad whisper. "Let the men-wolves hev their way to the end. Be a man now; no growlin' an' no kickin' on ther verdict—"

"But, by Jerusalem—"

"Hush! Do you want me to desert you, too?"

The grumbler, awed by look and words, made no reply, and the man of grit sealed his lips and looked defiantly at the fifty bronze judges of the gold camp.

It was near the close of a fall day in the year '69 and almost in the shadow of magnificent Mount Shasta which lifts his head above the rich gold placers of Northern California.

Nugget City was nothing more than a mining-camp which was known far and wide as the abode of some of the most celebrated characters then dwelling within the limits of the Golden State.

One of the most famous mines of those days—a mine forgotten now—ran under a great part of the camp, and men in Sacramento and San Francisco had gone wild over some nuggets extracted from its depths.

Nugget City had prospered, although its people cared more for pursuits other than mining.

Everybody had heard of the faro banks, monte tables and a dozen other games peculiar to California which flourished there.

It was, in short, a typical town of the gold region where men gambled, quarreled and killed as an every-day diversion, and I cannot say that Nugget City had no rivals in the land of gold.

But what of the two men we have seen lashed together and about to be banished from camp by the half a hundred desperate fellows who had just tried and judged them?

Men had been shot and lynched in the streets of Nugget City, Chinamen were forbidden to enter the place on pain of death, and Indians had been kicked like footballs beyond its boundaries.

But no citizen had ever been outlawed or banished.

Surely these two men had committed some dark offense against the "peace and dignity" of the gold camp—an offense not warranting the death penalty, yet great enough to outlaw them to the mountains that towered above Nugget like pillars of doom!

The scene we have referred to in several brief sentences had never been witnessed before in the mountain town.

The outlawed men were fastened together side by side by ropes which lashed the right arm of one to the left arm of the other, and the hands of both were imprisoned at their backs.

Then, their legs were tied in like manner almost to the knees, thus making freedom without help one of the impossibilities.

One of the men was fully a head taller than the other, and the tall one was he who exhibited the most coolness.

Dark Dan was a character of Northern California in those flush and desperate days.

Built like a giant with a face almost as dark as a Klamath Indian's, with midnight eyes, long black hair and sweeping mustache, he was a man to be picked out among a thousand for a leader of men, for a master spirit among the gold desperadoes of the farther West.

Wherever Nugget City was mentioned, men referred to Dark Dan.

He had created a furore in certain quarters of Sacramento, and lassoed an Indian enemy in the streets of Frisco.

Desperate? Yes; but with a heart "big as an ox's" as the saying runs.

His companion on the day when he is introduced to the reader was not his equal in height.

His shoulders were not so broad as Dan's, but his face was almost as dark, and his eyes had a despondent look whenever he glanced at the cords that bound him to the giant of the camp.

A stranger coming into Nugget City at the time of the actual opening of our story would have wondered why those two men, so dissimilar in size and looks, had been banished together.

Were they pard's?

No.

The man called Lonely Jack, by Dark Dan, had not been an inmate of Nugget City more than five days prior to their sentence.

Previous to that time he and Dark Dan had never met.

Lonely Jack came from—nobody knew where.

He was about forty years old, morose but not inclined to sullenness, although he seldom said anything to anybody.

But, somehow or other, Dark Dan had discovered good traits in the fellow, and when Lonely Jack was accused of theft, he became his champion.

From the moment of accusation the whole camp was against Lonely Jack—all but Dark Dan.

Although the stolen articles were found secreted under the couch of the accused, the giant still proclaimed him innocent.

"It's a mean conspiracy to get rid of Lonely Jack," said Dark Dan to himself. "Well, let 'em; but I stand by him to the last!"

The trial before Windy Rube, the alcalde of the camp, was a farce, but it went further than the originators intended it should go.

Dark Dan stood by Lonely Jack from the first, and thereby added to the number of his enemies.

"If you banish Lonely Jack, by Jerusalem! he sha'n't go alone!" he exclaimed, in the courtroom, to the astonishment of all. "You sha'n't send him by himself among Injuns an' grizzlies with his hands lashed behind him. Hyer! tie me ter Lonely Jack, an' we'll see this banishment through together."

What better could the men of Nugget City have asked?

They saw that Dark Dan meant every word he uttered, and the mountain court with ill-concealed pleasure, passed on him the sentence already pronounced on Lonely Jack.

There were some who thought that Dark Dan would back out when the ordeal came; but these did not know the man they judged.

He had determined to stand by the stranger who had come to Nugget City, and he submitted without a murmur, though his eyes blazed while they were being lashed together.

Side by side they stood in the last beams of the sun that was sinking behind Shasta, Lonely Jack despondent and with eyes on the ground, Dark Dan erect as a chief, with orbs that gleamed like the eagle's.

"All ready! Now go to the mountains!" suddenly rung out the voice of Windy Rube. "You men are by our laws banished forever from Nugget City. All livin' creatures ar' on pain of death forbidden ter cut ye loose."

"God above!" groaned Lonely Jack. "Must my great trail end thus?"

Dark Dan gave him a rebuking glance, but did not speak.

"An' it is furthermore decreed that the claims of Dark Dan to feet in the mines of Nugget shall be confiscated for the good of the general public!" continued the alcalde-judge. "An' the two prisoners will forfeit their lives the moment they set foot in the shadow of this court. March!"

The eyes of Dark Dan, which were riveted on Windy Rube while he spoke, fell again to his companion.

"Forward it is, Lonely Jack," he said, in even cheerful tones. "Off we ar' ter ther land of grizzlies an' reds!"

He took a step forward and the next minute the two men, thus strangely united, were walking toward the northern confines of the gold camp.

The fifty desperate fellows left behind would have cheered if a look from Windy Rube had not checked them.

"I've known Dark Dan for ten years, but I never saw him play fool afore," said Windy, in audible tones, while he watched the banished men. "By heavens! if he thinks Nugget City will relent an' cut 'im loose, he's badly sold. We mean business, an' we sent them two galoots from camp ter die of starvation among the gold hills."

The triumphant crowd watched the doomed men until they reached the very edge of the camp.

There they halted.

The mountains were about to swallow them as it were, Shasta would soon receive them among his shadows and deadly trails.

The land of merciless red enemies and of grizzlies was before them and without a single weapon, and lashed together by ropes no human power could break, they were helpless—two strong men as helpless as babes.

All at once the judges of Nugget City saw the two pards turn toward the camp.

"By George! they're comin' back! Dark Dan wants ter be cut loose already!" cried men at the alcalde's side.

No.

The two men did not advance, but were standing erect with their eyes fixed on the speechless and curious crowd.

"Listen!" said Windy Rube, lifting his hand for silence and starting forward. "We're goin' ter hear suthin' from Dan."

The crowd was too far away to see Dark Dan's lips move, but they moved just the same.

He did not speak for the bronzed pards to hear him.

He uttered only one sentence, but it was enough.

It made Lonely Jack's eyes flash.

"Vengeance and death will make us even!"

CHAPTER II.

FIVE YEARS LATER.

FIVE years later—five years to the very day. Night was rapidly settling over Carson City, Nevada, that famous place which sprung up like a mushroom at the foot of the Sierra.

From every outlet miners were coming in from the mines, and the saloons and gambling-dens were already in full blast.

The last loads of quartz were rumbling through the town, the grimy drivers were swearing in hoarse English at the tired-out oxen, the stage from Placerville had just stopped in front of the Howling Wilderness Hotel, and two men were firing at each other with only the narrow street between them!

All these incidents were occurrences of daily life in the Carson City of which we write.

Nevada was seeing flush times, with no room for alms-houses, and no end to bonanza kings.

Standing in front of a rather pretentious brick building was a man who had acquired both fame and fortune.

The former, it was said, he had possessed for years, the latter had been acquired within the present lustrum.

In person, this individual was six feet above the boots he wore; his physique was powerful, his arms seemingly unusually long, and he wore his hair over his shoulders, *a la* Buffalo Bill.

His garments were dark brown in color, durable in texture, and had seen a good deal of service. His coat, if coat it can be called, it so nearly approached the jacket in make-up, reached only a few inches below his waist, and was open in front, displaying a gray shirt front ornamented with silver braid.

A rather light and attractive sombrero sat on his head, and added somewhat to the devil-may-care appearance which, it must be confessed, he had.

"The town grows like a hop-vine," this man said aloud to himself, throwing quick but scrutinizing looks up and down the busy street. "They'll always be gold-mad hyer, I guess—gold-mad an' whisky-crazy. Pshaw! I'd like ter snuff out them ar' dens as I'd snuff out a candle, but what's ther use? Others 'd take their places, an' find fools ter patronize them. Hello!"

His last exclamation was called forth by a genuine Indian who came out of a flourishing monte bank almost opposite the place he occupied.

"I know thet Greaser," he went on, with his eagle eyes, black as midnight, riveted on the red-skin who at first sight seemed to have fared badly at the hands of the card-sharks always to be found on the inside. "I haven't seen him for almost five years, but I know him. By Jerusalem! Crested Hawk, you're the last saine I expected ter meet in Carson City. Got bu'ster inside, eh? Wal, even a red fool an' his money ar' soon parted. I'll see what fetched you hyer anyhow."

At this juncture the Indian started off down the street, and the giant white man followed him, but on the opposite sidewalk.

Although the Indian, jostled and stared at by hundreds, was at times almost swallowed up in the crowds that swarmed the streets, the keen-eyed trailer did not lose sight of him for a moment.

His interest in the red-skin seemed to increase the longer he watched him, and when he at last saw Crested Hawk cross the street with his eyes fixed on the red light and brilliant legend above another monte hole, his eagerness appeared to exude at his bronzed finger-ends.

He stopped and waited for the Indian.

All at once a hand fell lightly on the red's shoulder, and the next instant the two men, red and white, were looking into each other's eyes.

The recognition was mutual, the stalwart white man in the sombrero had not mistook his man, and the Indian knew him at a glance.

"You've learnt ter buck ther tiger since I saw you last," smiled the white. "Don't you know thet's blamed risky business for a red in these gold towns?"

"Crested Hawk knows," was the quick rejoinder. "But who taught him how to bet on the little spots?"

"Thar! I'll acknowledge it, reddy," laughed the American. "I did show you how to stake yer dust—you begged me so hard, you know—but I didn't promise thet you'd always win."

"No."

"Well, you've lost to-night?"

The Indian's look answered.

"White man play mainly ag'in Crested Hawk," he growled.

"That's what he'll always do. Whenever an Injun bucks the tiger, the tiger comes out ahead, invariably. What hev ye left?"

Crested Hawk did not attempt to conceal the impoverished condition in which he had left the lair of the monte monster, but drew from its sheath an elegant bowie with a handle of pure silver, and blade of the best steel, one of the handsomest weapons of the kind in existence.

He glanced at the white man as he extended the bowie, handle first, toward him.

"Is that all?" exclaimed the giant in astonishment.

"All."

"An' you had yer eyes on thet headlight while you war crossin' the street?"

"Mebbe so."

"You were goin' in?"

"Yes."

"To prod the tiger ag'in?"

"Bet yer loots, brother."

"Heavens! you warn't goin' ter put up this pretty knife, war you?" was the exclamation.

"Crested Hawk seen white men win with their last stake."

"So hev I, but an Injun never, I tell ye."

"Red-skin try, anyhow," and the Indian's eyes wandered wistfully, and with eagerness, to the door of the monte den then in full blast.

"You sha'n't risk thet bowie," said the listener. "Thar's not another like it in the West, an' I know thet it's as well known hyer as its

owner. If you do want to retrieve your fortune—if you are not satisfied with the clawin' the tiger's already given you—hyer, take this, an' give him another whirl."

As the speaker finished, several twenty-dollar gold pieces dropped beside the bowie on the red's dark hand, and lent a glitter to his keen black eyes.

"Never play that bowie off," continued the white. "If you ever do, fortune will surely desert you. When did you hit Carson?"

"Yesterday."

"From the Sierra?"

"No; from Walker river."

"Saw nothin' ov my friends, I reckon?"

Crested Hawk shook his head and took a step toward the monte hole.

"Thar's gettin' nothin' satisfactory out ov you till they've stripped you a second time," laughed the giant. "Now, sir, go into the Nevada jungle an' tackle the beast. I'll go with you an' witness the tussle. Come on."

Side by side the representatives of the two great races entered the gambling-den, and the Indian's eyes fairly flashed when they caught sight of the motley crowd at that time paying their addresses to the presiding genius of the place.

"Cheeky Conrad's Paradise," as the resort was called, was not far from the Howling Wilderness Hotel, and was a place much sought after by the latest stage arrivals if they were disposed, as they generally were, to risk the dust brought from the mines among the gold hills.

It was, also, one of the most infamous places of the kind in Carson City, and its monte tables were frequented indiscriminately by miners, gamblers, Indians and Chinese.

It was twenty per cent. worse than the den where Crested Hawk had just lost his gold.

Nothing could restrain the Indian, and with a glance at the rather gaudy bar a few feet from the door, he walked straight toward an opening which he saw that moment at one of the monte tables.

The white man followed at a respectful distance, taking in the whole crowd as he did so, and receiving looks of recognition from many present.

He was no stranger there, but the looks of some manifested surprise as if their owners had not been expecting him.

No sooner had the red-skin reached the table than three gold pieces fell in a heap on the cloth, and he began his second fight for a fortune.

The dealer, a well-dressed fellow with cold gray eyes and waxed mustache, glanced quickly at Crested Hawk's belt and fixed a pair of covetous eyes on the silver hilt of the bowie which had been left uncovered.

Then he looked into the red-skin's face and seemed to see that he staked his all in cash on the first venture.

"He's play-mad to-night," the dealer said to himself. "Maybe I'll get a chance at that wonderful bowie."

Then the game went on, watched eagerly by Crested Hawk who seemed to see nothing but the cards.

He was not kept in suspense long, for all at once a wild cry rose from his lips and some one near by said with a laugh:

"Another Injun clawed by the tiger!"

Only the dealer who sat in front of the red-skin saw the madness that blazed up in his black orbs, and with an insinuating smile he said:

"Try 'er once more, Hawk. The goddess is coy to-night."

Crested Hawk stood for a moment undecided; he forgot that the friend who had accompanied him stood at his elbow, and he saw only the bantering eyes fixed upon him, the eyes that laughed at his ill-luck and dared him on.

"Here! two hundred for this!" suddenly cried the excited Indian; and the silver-handled bowie glittered for a moment in the lamp-light as it descended to the table, driven downward by Crested Hawk's right arm.

The gray-eyed dealer could hardly repress a shout of delight.

It was the work of an instant, and the red-skin stood erect, proud of his achievement, and flashing the light of his eyes around upon the astonished players.

"Two hundred for that bowie? Here's the clinkers!" cried the dealer; but before one gold piece struck the cloth, a bronze hand swooped down over the Indian's shoulder, and alighted like a hawk on the silver hilt.

"This goes no further, Hawk," said a stern voice, and the red-skin, with a mad remonstrance on his lips, wheeled upon the speaker—his giant white friend.

"Come with me," continued the stalwart fellow. "By Jerusalem! you'd play yer head off, an' I don't want you to lose it just yet." And Crested Hawk found himself walking toward the door clutched at the shoulder by the big man in whose hands he—the Indian—seemed but a child.

The disappointed dealer sprang up with a curse of bitterest rage.

The silver-handled bowie had disappeared!

"God above! who do you call that man?" cried one of the gamblers.

"Flash Dan, the Nevada Nabob!" said the dealer.

"Flash Dan, eh? I can't be mistaken. No; it is the same fellow. Five years ago we called him Dark Dan in Nugget City."

"That may be. He's liable ter change his name. He's Flash Dan ter us."

The man who had asked about the giant's identity did not reply, but kept his eyes fixed on him until the doors of the monte den had admitted him upon the street.

Then, scrutinizing the occupants of the place for a minute, he turned and followed Flash Dan and the red-skin.

"That galoot hyer with us?" he murmured.

"I must warn the boys."

Three minutes later he entered another monte den just as five men left one of the tables.

"Wal," said the new-comer, "he's turned up at last."

"Who?" asked the five in concert.

"Dark Dan—known as Flash Dan hyer!"

"No!"

"By Jupiter, he has! Shall we fight him hyer, or go back ter Bowie Bar?"

"Fight 'im hyer!" flashed the five.

CHAPTER III.

THE TAHOE INFANT.

THE six men grouped together in the light of the monte den were powerful fellows.

Their looks and garments proclaimed them men of the mountains and sojourners only at Carson City.

The grime of the mining-camps still adhered to their heavy boots; they had come to Carson for "a time," and their presence among the gambling holes told plainly that they had been having it.

Men like them in appearance probably came to Carson every day, for the mountains round about were honeycombed with gold-mines; but the close observer might have seen that something more than mere acquaintance bound the six together.

They did not belong to Nevada, but to California.

Across the border and among the exhaustless gold placers of the Sierra, these men had established their head-quarters, and far and wide their place of habitation was known as Bowie Bar.

Like all gold camps, this one had a reputation which, I regret to say, was not much in its favor.

Men whose business was legitimate mining gave it a wide berth, although gold was said to abound at the Bar—gold and desperadoes, just as if they went together.

The six men were locally known as the Banded Blades.

The leader was called Windy Rube, and it was said that he had been a character in the Shasta country.

His companions were men of his own ilk, black-eyed, dark-faced, fierce and fearless, men who carried their hearts on their sleeves, and a bowie in their right hand.

Bowie Bar was an insignificant place before Windy Rube and pards came down upon it in the night dead broke and determined to make "a raise" in some manne.

They were just the men for the hour, and they arrived at the right time.

A few desperate fellows from a rival camp near by were trying to clean the Bar out, but the weapons of the six put an end to the battle which would never be forgotten.

It is needless to say that after this the Banded Blades were received into full communion, nor that they soon became the main men of the mountain camp.

In a short time their names were known everywhere and they had a record for desperateness and daring which the most villainous might covet.

I am relating no fanciful history, reader.

The wild gold camps of the Sierra abound in men like the Banded Blades of Bowie Bar; they are their natural adjuncts, and the history of no camp is complete without them.

Bowie Bar was a camp of perhaps thirty cabins, and it nestled between two rough mountains whose sides had been penetrated by the gold-seeking pick of the adventurous miner.

The cabins were rough structures, but they satisfied the wants of their owners, not a few of whom had secured gold enough to enable them to shine for awhile in better society.

The camp had none of the business rush of Carson or Virginia City, it boasted of no flourishing quartz mills, no hydraulic power, and nothing of that kind; but small as it was, it had its "hotel" and saloon, its monte bank and faro den, just as if where man was in the gold land, these things had to exist.

But Bowie Bar had more than this: it had something of which other camps could not boast.

It had a beautiful young girl, and an "infant" who tipped the beam at one hundred and ninety pounds.

The latter assertion may seem incredible, but it is true at least in a certain sense.

At nearly the same hour that witnessed the scenes in the monte banks of Carson City, as

detailed in the foregoing chapter, the so-called Infant of Bowie Bar was airing himself among the cabins.

He looked just what he was, an overgrown boy, big, lubberly, and, of course, good-natured, and considered harmless.

In age he had lately turned his seventeenth year, his joints appeared to be soft, and there were not wanting those in camp who were willing to make affidavit that his head was in the same condition.

He was a grotesque-looking creature, corpulent, bare-headed and coatless, and the possessor of a pair of pantaloons that tried in vain to touch his ankles.

He had come up from the Lake Tahoe country, and had laughed his way into the endurance of the pards of the Bar, by whom he was called the Tahoe Infant.

There was a good deal of sarcasm in this appellation, but the boy took kindly to it, for his nature was not of the fault-finding kind, and in less than a week after his arrival in camp, the Tahoe Infant was all the name he applied to himself.

I have said that this overgrown specimen of humanity was airing himself at Bowie Bar about the time that Flash Dan was leading Crested Hawk the red-skin from the monte den a few miles away.

He was walking back and forth with the assumed air of a man who is supremely happy, and at peace with the world.

His head was thrown back, and his fat thumbs had been forced under his suspenders near the armpits, and his step was ridiculously pompous.

"Ho! ho! got a good look at her!" he exclaimed. "Made her laugh three times, ha! ha! I'm a daisy pink 'mong a lot of roses, te, he! When the Tahoe Infant brings his batteries to bear on a young lady, she's got ter succumb. Catch me sleepin' when Cupid's loose in the diggin's? Not much, my gentle dandelions!" And the big boy indulged in a laugh that seemed to produce a world of satisfaction.

Now, there stood not far from the Tahoe Infant a broad-shouldered man with a bronzed face, a fellow who had a sombrero crushed over his brow, but not far enough to hide the pair of eyes that shone madly while the boy gave vent to his exuberant feelings.

"Hang me, if the natural-born fool doesn't think he's in love with Myra," said this man. "I'll have no such truck hangin' round an' persecutin' her. I always said we'd no use for a walkin' soap-factory at Bowie Bar. Of course he's harmless as a kitten, wouldn't fight for his existence, but he's a first-class nuisance. He's too big ter kick out o' camp for it'd take a jack ter lift him off ther ground, but durn me! ef he hasn't got ter go. He the mountain pink's lover? Wal, I guess not."

The man continued to eye the Tahoe Infant with looks that increased in rage while he continued his paces, and to relieve himself of more language similar to the specimen already given.

"He puts on more style than a Californy gold-bug," grated the watcher. "He struts about like a fightin'-cock after a tussle. He thinks more ov himself just now than a lord does ov his pedigree. Confound the blasted Infant anyhow! I feel like movin' on him, an' applyin' my boot whar I think it'd do the most good. Look at the lubber."

"She's partial ter bigness an' beauty, he, he!" suddenly exclaimed the big boy. "I'm both, you see—big, lovely, with the disposition of a lamb, an' just the object ter be loved and petted. Oh, the Tahoe Infant is in clover—"

"By Jupiter, I'll take you out ov the pasture!" interrupted the bronzed watcher as he took a great stride toward the unsuspecting boy, and reached his side before he was aware of his presence.

"Ho! ho! Stanislaus, where did you come from?" cried the Infant when he had recovered from the momentary fright occasioned by the new-comer's sudden appearance.

"Not from Tahoe! no, by Jupiter!" was the answer. "Who is that you're sweet on?"

"Eh?" replied the boy starting and looking into Stanislaus Steve's face. "Hev you ever heard me in my recreations, Stanislaus?"

"Yes! I couldn't help it," grated the tough whose flashing eyes boded the Tahoe Infant no good. "I don't like to see any one play the fool, much less a kid like you."

"Ho! ho! isn't thar suthin' in me for ladies ter admire, Stanislaus?" broke out the boy, as he jerked loose from the tough's hand, which had landed on his shoulder, and straightened himself in the twilight a few feet away, and in full view.

"In that mountain of fat an' fizzle?" cried Stanislaus Steve, at first disposed to laugh at the Infant's appearance. "If a friend ov mine'd fall in love with you, hang me ef I wouldn't suicide from shame! Now, thar's two women in camp. Which one has struck yer fancy?"

"The prettiest, ov course, he! he!" laughed the Infant.

"Mountain Myra?"

"Certainly. I've made her show her pearly teeth three times since sundown. I'm original in my remarks, Stanislaus; picked it up round

about Tahoe. Wonderful country that for fat an' knowledge, he, he, ha, ha, ha!"

The brow of Stanislaus seemed to grow darker at each succeeding outburst, and when the Infant had concluded it was of the hue of a thunder-cloud.

"You've broken one camel's back!" he thundered at the boy's side. "See hyar! Bowie Bar has put up with you long enough. You start for Tahoe or Hades—I don't care which—to-night."

The big boy might not have been quick of perception, but he must have seen that the flashing-eyed man before him was terribly in earnest.

"I don't want ter go back. I'm satisfied here," he said, with no laugh this time at the end of the sentence.

"But I'm not satisfied!" hissed Stanislaus Steve. "You face about this minute, an' back to Tahoe you go!"

"Why, that'd be leavin' Mountain Myra—"

"Thar! mention that name again an' I'll flatten yer face!" was the heartless interruption, and the ruffian's fist looked like a mountain of steel to the white-faced boy. "Come with me! I allow no fools ter interfere with my affairs."

"With your affairs, Stanislaus?"

"Thet's what I said, warn't it? Wal, thet's just what I meant. This way for Lake Tahoe." And he started off, leading the Infant almost speechless from terror.

"Hyar's the trail," he said, halting, with the big boy at the end of Bowie Bar, with the last cabin at his back and the frowning mountain before him. "You came over it from Lake Tahoe; you know ther way back. Now git!"

He pushed the Tahoe Infant forward and followed him with a fierce look.

The boy went on a few steps and stopped.

"For God's sake, Stanislaus, I can't go!" he exclaimed turning to the heartless rough.

"Gol no foolin'!" was the reply.

"But I've forgotten the way. It is a long distance to Tahoe, an' it is night besides. Let me go back to Bowie an' wait till mornin'."

"You wouldn't go then. By thunder! ef I give you a foot you'll take a mile. Forward ter Tahoe, my laughin' cherub! If it's the land ov original jokes, as you say, it's just the place for you."

The boy still hesitated.

"If Windy Rube an' his five pards war hyar you wouldn't drive me off," he said, exhibiting some spirit in his tones.

"Wouldn't, eh?" laughed Stanislaus Steve with defiance. "Let any man, or set ov men, interfere with my business, an' find out what I'll do. But you can't make me take water by mentionin' the Banded Blades ov Bowie Bar. They're not your friends an' I know it. I'm goin' back ter camp. Don't foller me!"

There was threat in the last sentence.

"Oh, Stanislaus! for heaven's sake don't exile me to death on the bear trails twixt hyar an' Tahoe!" he cried, as the ruffian turned to go.

"Go! I've locked my mercy box!" was the retort, and Stanislaus Steve walked deliberately away.

For one minute the Tahoe Infant watched his receding figure, then, with a sigh of despondency, though his eyes strangely flashed, he turned his face toward the distant lake.

"One fool got rid of," laughed Steve.

We will see, ruffian.

CHAPTER IV.

FLASH DAN'S NEW TRAIL.

LET us go back to Carson City.

It is the same night, and Flash Dan and Crested Hawk the Indian have reached the Howling Wilderness Hotel.

The fussy little man, bald-headed and spectacled, who presided over the place bowed obsequiously to the Nevada Nabob as he crossed the threshold, but glanced suspiciously at the Indian.

To tell the truth, Major Mossback didn't like Indians.

He had been chased and nearly caught by a lot of reds during a mining experience at the outset of his career, and ever since he held a deep-seated antipathy toward the gentle savage.

The Howling Wilderness was a well-to-do two-story building, and the proprietor was continually boasting that he had the best hotel "west of Mason and Dixon's line," and, for the life of him, he had no idea of the location of the afore-said line.

Flash Dan leaned toward the major and asked for a private room; then, as Mossback led the way, he looked at Crested Hawk and followed.

In less than five minutes after entering the hotel Flash Dan and the Indian found themselves in a poorly furnished, but tight upper room.

They had not fetched a light with them, and they needed none, for a full moon showered her beams into the place through a window, and rendered the interior of the room almost as light as at noonday.

"You would hev played that silver bowie off, wouldn't you?" were Flash Dan's words, as he turned upon the Indian.

For a moment Crested Hawk's eyes sunk beneath the Nabob's glance, then he started forward as if he had received new life.

"Yes; but let Flash Dan forgive the Indian. The loss of his gold made him mad; it set his heart on fire. He would have won with the bowie."

"No; you would have done no such thing. When you had lost what the dealer was about ter give fer the bowie, you'd hev got most devilish mad, an' somebody'd hev been hurt. I saw it war comin' ter thet ther moment you flung yer knife on the table. Thet kind o' playin' won't do hyer, Injun. You sha'n't play thet bowie off while I'm about."

"Very well," said the Indian, meekly. "Crested Hawk will not play it away."

"With it will go a human life. Don't I know yer disposition? Don't tell me thet yer could see thet knife go without kickin'. Thar's not another like it in ther hull gold kentry. But, see hyer. I fetched you hyer ter talk on suthin' else. When did you cross the Sierra 'twixt hyer an' Sacramento?"

The red-skin thought a moment.

"About three moons ago," he answered.

"Did you visit any of the camps?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Crested Hawk knows what Flash Dan wants to know."

"You ought to," said the Nevada Nabob, quickly. "Go on. Did you see anybody I know?"

Under his long black lashes the eyes of the Indian twinkled.

"Crested Hawk stopped at Bowie Bar," he said. "He saw some white people there—a girl whose face is like the gazelle's for beauty an' whose eyes shine like the stars."

"No one else?"

"Another woman, who can throw a revolver up into the air, catch it as it falls, an' wheel an' hit a quarter tossed up at the same time."

"Jehu! What do they call that trigger daisy?" cried Flash Dan.

"Modoc Kate," said the Indian.

"You saw a girl an' this shootin' phenomenon at Bowie Bar. Nothin' more?"

"Crested Hawk saw the Banded Blades."

The title seemed to interest the Nabob.

"Who ar' they, Hawk?"

"The six big braves of Bowie."

"Big, you say?"

"As big as Flash Dan," said the Indian quickly.

"All this circus is ter be seen at Bowie Bar, eh?" he exclaimed, a smile at the corners of his mouth.

"They're all there."

"No side-shows, eh?"

"Crested Hawk forgot the fat boy who laughs."

"The Tahoe Infant! I'll bet my boots!" ejaculated Flash Dan. "He's a character an' no mistake. Saw him last spring down to Tahoe an' came near shootin' 'im for a grizzly. Got ter Bowie Bar, has he? It's a wonder the Banded Blades put up with his foolishness."

"White men there no like him very well," said the Indian. "They kick 'im out mebbe by 'm by."

"They wouldn't ef I war thar," flashed Flash Dan suddenly. "Ov course I'm the particular champion ov no one, but thet boy wouldn't hurt a fly an' no big galoots with better sense than he's got, shall shake 'im when I'm around. Well, Hawk, I'm goin' ter see thet circus."

Crested Hawk gave a visible start.

"To Bowie Bar?" he exclaimed.

"Why not? Thar may be some good pluckin' thar, an' then I had six haters once."

Crested Hawk's look was a question and it made the Nabob continue:

"It war just five years ago to-night. You know all about it, Injun, for I told you. It war ther meanest trick white men ever did—ter accuse Lonely Jack ov theft when he could hev been trusted with piles of nuggets, an' ter send him out inter the mountains lashed ter a man who had only knowed him five days. Wal, it made me Flash Dan, but what ov thet, Hawk? Of course you found us hungry an' blamed nigh played out, an' cut our bonds, but thet war the beginnin' ov Lonely Jack's end."

Crested Hawk's hand was on Flash Dan's arm when he paused; a sudden bound had carried him forward.

Eagerness lit up the depths of the red-skin's eyes.

"Where is Lonely Jack?" he asked. "Where did Flash Dan leave him after they left Crested Hawk on the mountain trail?"

"I left him in a cave to hunt suthin' eatable, an' while I war gone the infernal storm thet ever raged broke over the kentry. It tore up forests, overturned mountains an' changed the hull face ov the land. No use huntin' for Lonely Jack after such a time as that."

The Klamath shook his head.

"But I did hunt for him all the same," continued Flash Dan. "He hed half told me a story the end ov which I wanted ter get the worst kind. I wanted ter know what fetched him ter Nugget City in the first place, an' ef thet storm hedn't interfered I'd hev found out, too. I never could find the cave whar I left my pard, an' after a long hunt for it I struck out across the mountains, made several bossstakes far away

an' hyer I am—Flash Dan ov Nevada! I've prospered pretty well, Hawk, but you're reduced to thet silver-handled bowie." And the Nevada Nabob chuckled till the Indian looked ashamed and half angry.

"Crested Hawk make a raise by 'm by," he said, significantly.

"How? by pawnin' that knife?"

"No. The Klamath got something here thet'll make the money come back to him," and he struck his breast with the flat of his hand as he concluded.

"What's that?" cried Flash Dan. "What hev you picked up since I saw you last?"

Crested Hawk made no reply, but thrust his hand beneath the buckskin jacket he wore, and to the Nabob's astonishment drew forth a small but elegant gold locket.

"Great Jupiter! whar did you light on thet?" cried Flash Dan, as his eyes seemed about to start from his head, and his hand swooped down upon the trinket. "Lonely Jack carried that next his heart the last time I saw him! Whar did you run across it, Injun?"

"Picked it up three years ago on the big gold trail," said Crested Hawk with truth impressed on each word.

"The thunder you did!"

Flash Dan walked to the window with the locket in his hand as he finished.

"Watch stopped when Crested Hawk find it; it no go since," said the red-skin, whose eyes followed him.

The Nevada Nabob made no reply, but stopped in the brilliant moonlight, and the next second the locket opened with a clear click.

The Klamath bounded forward with wonder in his eyes.

"Watch go ag'in!" he exclaimed.

"No watch hyar," said Gold Dan. "See what you think ov this, Hawk."

Flash Dan held the opened locket so that the moonlight fell full upon it, and Crested Hawk bent over it with much eagerness and curiosity.

All at once he straightened and uttered a startling exclamation.

"The mountain bird! Crested Hawk knows the trail that leads to her!"

Flash Dan threw him a quick, but penetrating look.

"Crested Hawk saw her three moons ago. He did not know that he carried her face over his heart at that time."

"You might hev known it if you hed fooled with the locket," said the Nabob. "Whar is the original ov this portrait?"

"At Bowie Bar."

"Heavens, no! not thet close?"

"She was there when Crested Hawk left the gold camp."

"She was the goal ov Lonely Jack's ambition. It war for her, as I b'lieve, he came ter Nugget City whar she wasn't; it war for her that he hunted an' thought all the time. I'm goin' ter find her now. I'll be a friend ter her because Lonely Jack loved her. God above! to-night I start out on a new trail. The pards ov Nugget City made me love Lonely Jack when they tied me to him, an' banished us from camp. I then said thet vengeance an' death would make us even. I've been a long time gettin' thar, Hawk; but mebbe I'm goin' ter begin to-night. Come! To Bowie Bar!"

Crested Hawk saw Flash Dan take complete possession of the gold locket, but he did not complain.

"You'll go with me, Hawk?" said the Nabob.

"Yes; Flash Dan's trail has become the Klamath's."

The two men, strange pards, left the room together, and at sight of them in the room below, Major Mossback came nervously forward.

"Don't go out," he cried excitedly to Flash Dan. "You've been inquired for. They're out thar—I know they ar'. They want you bad."

"Who?"

Flash Dan's hand touched his revolver.

"The six big pards from Bowie Bar."

The Nevada Nabob laughed.

"Want me, eh? I'm the most accommodatin' cuss on earth!" he said, moving toward the door.

"No, sir! You sha'n't go out an' get riddled," exclaimed the excited landlord of the Howling Wilderness. "Nevada can never have but one Flash Dan, and I protest against this useless exposure of your person. Let the Indian go out and tackle them."

"Never! I guess I've faced men afore," said Flash Dan quietly. "Come, Hawk."

But Major Mossback braced himself against the door and looked almost defiantly into the Nabob's face.

"Oh, come, major; no foolishness," cried Flash Dan.

"I'll be hanged if I do!"

The next moment the Nevada sport took a stride forward, and the major was jerked from the door without ceremony.

As he picked himself up six feet away Flash Dan stepped into the street!

CHAPTER V.

THE FAILURE TO FIGHT.

"GREAT J'osaphat! they won't leave a grease-spot of him!" exclaimed Major Mossback

thoroughly alarmed for the safety of Flash Dan, the man Nevada could not spare.

He went toward the door, but Crested Hawk who had followed at the Nabob's heels shut it in his face before he reached it.

The irate and solicitous landlord of the Howling Wilderness Hotel waited for the opening of the sanguinary battle which he thought could not be postponed a moment.

But not a pistol-shot assailed his ears.

Had the six big bravos of Bowie Bar backed out?

He could hardly believe this, for he saw fight in their eyes when they entered the hotel a short time before, on the hunt of Flash Dan.

If the hunted man had been in the "reception-room" and not up-stairs at the time, Carson City would have witnessed another bloody affray.

Contrary to Major Mossback's expectations, Flash Dan found no suspicious characters ready to riddle him when he stepped upon the street with the eagle-eyed and ready Indian at his back.

On both sides and across the street, monte dens were running in full blast, but the half dozen from Bowie Bar did not confront him.

"White men tired of lookin'," said Crested Hawk. "Gone back to monte, mebbe."

"They didn't want ter see me as badly as the major let on," replied the Nabob, a quiet smile at the corners of his mouth and under the ends of his elegant mustache.

"You have seen the six, Hawk?"

The Klamath nodded.

"You never saw Nugget City in its glory?"

"No."

"Then, you do not know these pards who war lookin' for me awhile ago. Ah! I know 'em!" Crested Hawk did not speak.

"I'll bet my hat thet their boss is called Windy Rube, an' thet the next best man is Faro Phil," continued Flash Dan. "I hev'n't forgot the gang thet sent Lonely Jack into the Shasta mountains lashed to a man he hadn't known a week. I never forget. When you told me, Hawk, that thar war six big pards at the camp called Bowie Bar, I got on ter 'em at once. One ov these days, Injun—"

Flash Dan paused at the touch of the red-skin's hand on his arm.

"The Banded Blades have come," he said in a whisper.

At that moment the door of the monte saloon at the Nabob's right and scarcely thirty feet away had opened, and six men had emerged from the place.

"Windy Rube an' pards," passed the Nabob's lips as he took in the whole set at a glance.

At the same time the locks of his two revolvers clicked, and he straightened in the moonlight.

The recognition was instantaneous and mutual.

"Thar he is!" exclaimed six men almost at the same time, and the two revolvers that Flash Dan thrust forward were met by others in hands just as deadly as his.

"I am hyar, pards of Nugget," he said, calmly. "Major Mossback has just informed me that you war lookin' me up, an' I'm one ov the most accommodatin' citizens ov Nevada. I hev'n't seen you for five years, an' I expect our partin' is as fresh in your minds as it is in mine!"

There was no response save from the lips of the thoroughly frightened man who stood in the half-opened door of the hotel.

"Gentlemen, for Heaven's sake settle yer difficulty without resort to the pistol," said the major. "It is a barbarous weapon, and gentlemen should adjust their personal difficulties without it."

"This is our picnic," said the man, who stood before the five roughs as he gave the major a look that hastened his withdrawal, and then he turned to Flash Dan again.

"Yes, and hev been huntin' for you," he said.

"Wal?"

"A question ef you please. Ar' you the man once called Dark Dan in ther Shasta kentry?"

"I'm thet individual," was the prompt rejoinder.

"I thought so. We've got a curiosity ter know what became ov yer pard ov thet night—Lonely Jack."

Flash Dan's face darkened at these words.

"He died," he said.

"Oh, he did, eh?"

"Thet's what I said."

"Who cut ye two loose?"

"Crested Hawk, the Klamath," exclaimed the Indian, proudly, before the Nabob could answer. "The Indian hunter found the two white men tied together among the mountain trails an' his knife set them free. It was the Klamath's work! What say the big white pards to it?"

"We say thet you did right," came the quick response. "Flash Dan, we got over our mad spell afore the next mornin' came. We hunted for you an' Lonely Jack, but failed to find you."

Windy Rube found the giant tough looking searchingly into his face when he finished.

Did Flash Dan believe him?

"So you repented?" he said, smiling.

"Yes. We never thought till to-night thet Flash Dan an' Dark Dan war ther same per-

son. We've exchanged Nugget City for Bowie Bar."

"So I understand," said Flash Dan.

"Come an' see us."

"Mebbe I will."

That was all, no pistol-shots, nobody killed.

It was a tame outcome to the thrilling meeting, and a look of disgust overspread the Nabob's face as he lowered his revolvers and glanced at Crested Hawk as if to say "what do you think of it?"

What had come over the spirit of the big pards' dreams?

A few moments before they were hunting Flash Dan with flashing eyes and hands at the butts of cocked revolvers.

There was fight in their looks, and Major Mossback had not judged them wrongly.

But all of a sudden they had backed down, and the man they wanted was possessor of the field.

"Back to the Bar, boys," said Windy Rube to his companions when Flash Dan and the Indian had returned to the hotel to be overwhelmed with congratulations by the landlord on the bloodless outcome of the meeting.

"He will walk into the trap we'll set thar for him. I saw by the way he answered my invitation thet he'll come. Half ov Carson City would help avenge Flash Dan; at the Bar he'll hev no friends—not one! Back to the Bar, I say. The biggest nugget in Nevada is bound ter fall inter our hands."

"All right, Windy; thet may be yer plan, but it isn't mine," growled one of the six.

"Wal, Faro?"

"Finish 'im hyar—thet's what I say. Hang Carson! Let thet fellow spend thirty minutes in Bowie Bar, an' he'll hev friends who'd die for 'im!"

"Who'll they be?" asked Windy Rube, bestowing a very unpleasant look on Faro Phil the fault-finder.

"I can't name 'em just now, but he'll get 'em just the same."

"I'll risk his makin' friends thar. He won't be ten minutes in camp before we'll spring the trap."

"He won't come alone, either."

"No; thet Injun will be with him. What's one Injun to us?"

"Not a great deal, mebbe, but the red at Flash Dan's back is no one-hoss Greaser."

Faro Phil was determined to remain displeased, despite Windy Rube's protestations.

"I never kick over the traces," he said half-under his breath; "but let me tell you the moment you let Flash Dan inter Bowie Bar, thet moment you get a handful."

This was the rough's parting shot, and he fell in and moved off sullenly with his companions.

It had been determined at first that Flash Dan should be fought in Carson City, yet that night, Windy Rube, always fertile in schemes, had matured a different plan.

In his encounter with the Nevada Nabob, he had carried out a part of the plan.

Choking back his fear and hatred of Flash Dan, he had professed repentance for the deed perpetrated five years before in the Shasta region, but he had good cause for doubting that Dan had accepted the thinly veiled apology.

Windy Rube had discovered that Flash Dan was popular in Carson City, and this helped to dissuade him from fighting him there.

It was still the era of lynch courts, of lasso and swift justice, and the men who should slay Flash Dan in Carson, would find a thousand avengers at their heels.

But in Bowie Bar camp he had no friends; nobody would rise up as his avenger.

There was the place to settle with the man who wanted vengeance for the banishment of five years before.

The Banded Blades did not tarry in Carson long after their encounter with Flash Dan.

They had ridden into the town on horseback, and on horseback they went out, six dark-faced fellows, whose desperate looks were enough to make them dreaded anywhere.

They rode two and two over the narrow and somewhat dusty trail that stretched from Carson toward the heart of the gold range over the line.

All seemed satisfied that Flash Dan would come to Bowie Bar, and that they would finish there the feud engendered at Nugget City the night they sent Lonely Jack adrift, lashed to the Nevada Nabob.

They wondered where Flash Dan had been all this time.

They could not tell why he had not hunted them up before, if he hated them so cordially, and they talked about this as they rode along.

"He war busy makin' Flash Dan a name in these parts; I guess thet explains it," concluded Windy Rube, to his own satisfaction at least. "We'll git at the bottom ov the myst'ry afore we've played the game cl'ar through. What we don't get out ov Dan, we'll get from his copper-colored pard."

"From thet Injun?" cried Faro Phil, darting a look at his leader. "You'll get but one thing from him."

"An' what's thet, Faro?"

"The silver-handled bowie he totes about under his buckskin coat."

Windy Rube broke into a laugh.

"I saw it ter-night, an' it's a dandy," he said.

"The red would hev played it away ef Flash Dan hedn't interfered."

"Wal, fool with the Injun an' get thet bowie; thet's my opinion," retorted Faro Phil.

"Then, we'll get the red first. By heavens! ef Flash Dan an' his Greaser pard come to Bowie Bar, they'll locate thar."

"They'll come as sure as death, an' thet's the surest thing I know of."

Nobody replied to Faro Phil's last remark, and the six roughs set their steeds in a gallop, for the trail at that part admitted of fast riding.

All at once Windy Rube leaned toward his companion, and touching his arm, said in low tones:

"Look hyar, Faro. Which ov the two women do you think Stanislaus Steve's after—Mountain Myra or Modoc Kate?"

"You ought ter know without askin' me, Windy. Ov course he doesn't want Kate."

"The girl, then?"

"Ov course! An' he's got a dandy rival hasn't he? ha, ha!"

"Who?" flashed the leader of the Blades, lightnings in his eyes.

"Why the Tahoe Infant. Catch thet piece ov livin' blubber out in the woods, an' you'll find him talkin' about the girl."

Windy Rube looked away, and Faro Phil saw him clench his hands.

CHAPTER VI.

WINDY RUBE'S INFAMOUS SHOT.

It was more than a day's journey on good horses from Carson City to Bowie Bar; but the six men who rode from the former place wanted to cover it as soon as possible.

They were eager to set the death-trap for the two men they had left behind, and once out of Carson and on the smoothest part of the trail they urged their horses forward.

It was not expected that Flash Dan and his red-skin ally would follow hard at their heels; days might elapse before the Nevada Nabob should set foot in the gold camp, but it was best to prepare for his coming right away.

The declaration by Faro Phil that the Tahoe Infant had fallen in love with the girl called Mountain Myra had clothed Windy Rube's face in a cloud of darkness.

There were baleful flashes in his eyes, that boded no good to the big baby of Bowie Bar, and the leader of the ruffians rode on sullen and silent.

All at once, when the band had reached the wildest part of the road between the two places and at a point nearer Bowie than Carson City, a "hello" from the lips of one startled all.

Faro Phil glanced at Windy Rube as they all drew rein.

"I'd rather not hev met ther Infant hyar," he said under his breath. "What on earth takes ther baby so far from camp?"

Standing in the road in full view of the Banded Blades, was the Tahoe Infant, the boy whom Stanislaus Steve had banished the night before from the gold camp because he had dared to make love to a young girl whom Steve himself pretended to think much of.

"Blamed ef it isn't ther Infant," cried Windy Rube at the first glance, and then he must have thought of what Phil had lately told him, for his eyes flashed madly again.

"The boy's out ov his latitude," said Faro.

"Yes, an' just whar I'd like, ov all places ter find 'im just now," murmured Windy Rube. "Come on, pards; we'll see what Tahoe has ter say for himself."

The little ruffian cavalcade rode forward again, and when the Tahoe Infant recognized them, he uttered an exclamation of joy and came toward them.

He could not think that all men were as merciless and cruel as Stanislaus Steve.

"Hello!" ejaculated Windy Rube, as he drew rein beside the big boy and leaned over toward him. "Ain't you a long distance from headquarters, Tahoe?"

"Yes, but I had ter come," was the quick answer.

"Hed ter? What's up?"

The eyes of the Tahoe Infant instantly showed signs of resentment.

"A man drove me from Bowie Bar—the meanest man on earth, I reckon."

"Who's thet?"

"Stanislaus Steve."

"The devil!" cried Windy Rube. "What war ther fracas 'twixt you an' Stanislaus?"

The fat boy hesitated.

To answer would be to acknowledge that he had fallen in love with the pink of the gold camp, he an overgrown, blubberly boy in love with a beautiful young girl, who had laughed heartily at his innocent advances.

"Don't hold yer tongue," said Windy Rube sternly. "You say thet Stanislaus banished you from ther Bar? New what made him do thet? Your fingers hev'n't been stickin' ter property not yer own?"

"Me steal?" cried the youth indignantly. "I'd sooner die than do that. Stanislaus said I hadn't any right ter talk to Mountain Myra."

"Oho!" exclaimed Windy Rube. "He's taken up with the pink has he?"

"I think so," said the boy becoming bolder. "I don't know why I hev'n't a right ter think something ov Myra if Stanislaus has. He told me to go back to Tahoe, an' he said that if I turned back to Bowie Bar, I'd find his mercy-box locked."

"An' you war goin' back ter Tahoe?" put in Faro Phil before Windy Rube could reply.

"Yes; there war no other place for me to go to after what Stanislaus said."

It was plain that the big boy had the sympathy of more than one member of the mounted band, but not a look of pity beamed in the leader's eyes.

"Look hyar; answer mesquar'ly," said Windy Rube suddenly. "Do I understand that you actually love that girl—that you have been persecutin' her with yer attentions?"

"Persecution? ho, ho!" and the Tahoe Infant showed his teeth. "She always laughed when I talked to her, an'—"

"Anybody will laugh at the words ov a fool," interrupted Windy Rube. "But thet's not what I want ter get at. Do you make love ter Mountain Myra?—thet's it!"

"Hev'n't I a right ter if she will listen?" asked the Infant innocently.

"No!" thundered the boss ov the Banded Blades. "You've no right ter do any such thing! By Jerusalem! I approve ov jist what Stanislaus did, though I don't like the secret motive thet animated him ter do it. I guess you'd better tramp on ter Tahoe."

Instantly the boy's countenance fell, and hope seemed to desert him.

"I can never get thar," he said in appealing tones. "My feet ar' cut an' sore. I haven't eaten anything since I left Bowie Bar. I am hungry."

"Go on, anyhow! I guess the Tahoe climate will prove healthier than this for you from now on," was the retort.

The youth looked from Windy Rube's merciless countenance into the faces of his companions.

"The bears will find me an' eat me up," he cried. "When I saw you I thought I had found friends, but all the mercy-boxes in the mountains must be locked ag'in' me like Steve's."

"I guess they ar'!" exclaimed Rube. "We don't want fools to fall in love with the prettiest pink thet ever blossomed in the gold hills. Move along!"

"All right if you say so," said the Tahoe Infant with a sigh of despair as he stepped aside to let the riders pass on. "But you must listen to me now."

"Wal, shoot ahead!" laughed Windy Rube.

"Mebbe the day will come when the men who drove the Tahoe Infant foot-sore an' hungry through the grizzly regions will regret their work!" he cried, his eyes snapping with rage like those of a pestered snake. "He will not forget Stanislaus Steve nor the Banded Blades ov Bowie Bar! One ov these days he will laugh at their misfortunes an' his hand will punish!"

"Do you threaten us, fool?" cried Windy Rube, whirling his horse toward the Infant as he half drew his revolver. "By Jupiter! I'll paint these rocks with yer brains."

"No; not now," said a calm stern voice and the bronzed hand of Faro Phil dropped on the ruffian's right arm as he looked him in the eye.

"Yes I will!" grated Windy Rube.

"No you won't! The boy never had all his buttons. What kin he do ag'in' us six?"

"A heap ov meanness ef he gets it inter his head. By George! hesha'n't threaten this mountain chick!"

Meanwhile the Tahoe Infant kept his place, and his eyes, of late full of nothing but merriment, were flashing hatred at Windy Rube.

"What do you say? escort him back to Bowie Bar?" said the ruffian leader, looking at Faro Phil.

"I'm willin' ter do what the majority ov the boys say," was the reply.

"Then we'll test it. All ov ye who ar' in favor ov totin' the Tahoe Infant back ter the Bar, hold up yer hands. Hands up!"

Faro Phil looked at the four men addressed. Not a hand went up.

"Thar! he moves on ter Tahoe, whar he properly b'longs," cried Windy Rube, proudly. "Let him tramp ahead an' look out for himself. We never want ter see you back at Bowie."

"That's what Stanislaus said," retorted the boy.

"An' it's jist what we mean. Never again show yer two hundred pounds ov fat at Bowie Bar! Ef you disregard this command we'll test a lasso with yer anatomy. Go!"

Banished a second time, the Tahoe Infant turned away.

The ruffians saw that his strength had almost failed him.

"He'll never git thar at thet gait!" suddenly laughed Windy Rube. "By Jupiter! I'd like ter see 'im run afoul ov a b'ar in one ov the passes! Thar'd be a picnic for sartain an' the liveliest howlin' these mountains ever heard!"

Good-by, Tahoe! Keep an eye opened for grizzlies!"

It was the hight of cruelty.

The last sentence had hardly left the speaker's lips when the outcast turned toward the group.

"I won't say good-by, for I'm going to pay the Blades ov Bowie for their cruelty!" he cried, in tones heard by all. "Ef I ever see Lake Tahoe's waters before I get even with Windy Rube, may the vultures pick my bones! I have made love to Mountain Myra an' she has told me that she would stand by me through thick an' thin!"

"Thet's a lie an' it's enough!" roared Windy Rube.

The following second his revolver seemed to leap from his belt at the mere touch of his dark hand.

"Don't shoot the boy!" cried Faro Phil, as his hand darted forward to arrest Windy Rube's intent.

"Don't touch me! By heavens! he intimates that the gal loves him! It's a lie! An' he threatens, too! I'll settle with him hyar!"

The infuriated rough jerked his arm from the fingers of Faro Phil which had already fallen upon it.

Madly he threw his revolver forward, and covered the youth a few yards down the trail.

The silence of a second followed the last word, and the report of a revolver broke the echoes of the crags.

It was a dastard's shot.

Struck by the bullet, the Tahoe Infant threw up his hands, and tottered forward a few feet to fall quivering across the mountain road.

Faro Phil looked into Windy Rube's eyes but said nothing.

"Now we'll go an' set ther trap for Flash Dan an' pard," the head ruffian said, and the next moment the six dashed away, leaving the Tahoe Infant lying where he had fallen.

There was triumph in Windy Rube's eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

THREATENED RETRIBUTION.

"THAR hev been some singular perceedin's in Bowie Bar since you fellers left," said the uncouth looking fellow who appeared at the head of Windy Rube's horse as he drew rein in the gold camp in the last quarter of the eventful day.

Windy Rube was seen to start as he gave the man a searching look.

"What's happened?" he asked.

"Wal, in the first place the Tahoe Infant has pulled up stakes an' left."

"Yes."

"Secondly, Stanislaus Steve has vamosed the camp."

"Wal—is thet all?"

"No. The mountain pink has gone ter bloom in other fields."

"Jerusalem! not thet bad!" cried the leader of the Banded Blades.

"Wait till I git through," said the bronze former coolly.

"Ef you've got more news ov ther same sort, I don't want ter hear it," growled Windy Rube.

"I hev'n't. If we've lost three we've got one in their place."

"Who?"

"A young galoot who struck ther Bar 'bout daylight this mornin'—a fellar what calls himself Nugget Ned. He's a clipper, I tell ye, Windy."

"Clipper be hanged! Did all this misfortune happen at once?"

"Pretty much. The most ov it took place night afore last."

"Stanislaus gone; Mountain Myra gone!"

"An' the Infant."

"He doesn't bother me," said Windy Rube with a glance at the men who had ridden behind him from Carson City, and who had witnessed the brutality toward the fat boy from Lake Tahoe. "Do you see any connectin' link between Myra's goin' away an' Steve's."

"Thar's the whisperin' ov a sartain nature at ther Bar."

"Perdition an' powder!" flashed Windy Rube.

"Is Kate gone, too?"

"No."

He turned his horse around without speaking another word, and left the group without warning.

"Thar's the maddest man in sixteen States," said Faro Phil, without a smile, while Windy Rube rode off. "I wouldn't keer ef all his hopes get blasted for what he did twixt hyar an' Carson. I'm a bad man, a desperate mean bummer, a mountain wildcat when I'm riled, but I wouldn't hev shot thet harmless boy for all the gold twixt hyar an' Shasta."

Meanwhile, Windy Rube was riding through the rough camp with dust on his heavy boots and fire in his eye.

"Myra gone, Stanislaus gone—thunder!" he grated. "This wouldn't hev happened if I hed stayed at home. Modoc Kate will know suthin' about it. She's been jealous of late, but she'll tell me what she knows for all that."

Three minutes later they halted before a cabin which had a neater appearance than those that flanked it, and just when he was about to leap from the horse a woman appeared at the door.

"Kate!" exclaimed Windy Rube.

"Kate" was a fine appearing woman of about five and thirty, although she looked much younger, for she took pains in regard to personal adornment.

Her dress was a neat-fitting piece of work, and just right in length to disclose a pair of neat feet and ankles.

She was bare-headed, and thus exhibited a mass of shiny locks as black as the eyes that sparkled behind her lustrous lashes.

Her form was of the medium hight, willowy, and graceful.

In short, Modoc Kate, as she was called, was, in person, fitted to play havoc with the sturdy hearts of the gold camps.

She recognized Windy Rube the instant he drew rein in front of her cabin, and in answer to his exclamation of "Kate!" she replied:

"Back again are you? And a little too late."

There was a twinkle in the depth of the eyes, as if the last words gave her real pleasure.

"So they've jist told me," said Windy Rube, biting his words off in a manner that proclaimed his feelings. "Have they gone off together, Kate?"

"I think so."

"Stanislaus an' Myra! Great heavens! what did the girl mean?"

"I didn't get to ask her."

"Why didn't you stop 'em?"

"I didn't know they were going."

"Soul of Satan! why didn't I stay at home?"

"They wouldn't have gone probably if you had."

"By Jupiter! they would not! But how did it happen?—what do you know about it? Nothing can happen hyar without you knowin' suthin' about it."

He was on his horse no longer, but stood before the handsome woman, with eagerness and rage strangely mingled in his eyes.

"Go on! tell me! Woe to Stanislaus if I find him! The hound! the whelp ov Bowie Bar! Shoot it all out, Kate. I'm burnin' up ter get at ther solid truth!"

These sentences shot from between his clinched teeth like explosive caps, one after the other.

"I don't know much about it, as I have told you," said Modoc Kate, "and besides I wouldn't carry on that way over a thing of the kind anyhow."

"No; you wouldn't; you're a woman," he flashed. "I don't blame you for keepin' cool, but me—by Jerusalem! I could sarve Stanislaus as I sarved thet laughin' fool."

"What fool?" cried Modoc Kate as she instantly changed in color and expression. "Did you meet the Tahoe Infant on the trail?"

"I should remark," smiled Windy Rube significantly.

"He was runnin' away, then?"

"Bound for Tahoe."

"Not alone?"

"Alone."

"Merciful heavens! the bears will kill him!"

"No they won't! they can't do thet."

"Why didn't you fetch him back to the Bar?"

"Because we've put up with him long enough. But go on an' tell me what you know about Stanislaus an' Myra's goin' off."

Modoc Kate did not reply for a minute.

Several times she seemed on the eve of continuing her questions about the Tahoe Infant, but something appeared to hold her back.

"We missed them yesterday morning," she said, looking into Windy Rube's face. "The men missed Stanislaus Steve first, and it wasn't long before it was discovered that Myra had gone, too. They went in the night."

"Together, you think?"

"Undoubtedly. There are the hoof-tracks of two horses on the trail that puts away south from the Bar, and the men who measured them say that they belonged to Stanislaus and Mountain Myra."

"Je-hos-a-phat!" drawled Windy Rube surprisedly. "Thet ought ter settle it; but I never thought she would go off with a whelp like Stanislaus. War you thunderstruck, Kate?"

"I'm prepared for anything," said Modoc Kate, showing two rows of pearly teeth in a smile. "We women take queer freaks sometimes."

"An' the queerest one ever cut war when Myra went off with Stanislaus!" growled the captain of the Banded Blades. "Wal, they're not clear yet. When Stanislaus coaxed that girl off he forgot thet he left revolvers an' lassoes behind!"

"Who said he coaxed her off?"

"You."

"No, I didn't. I said they went off together, and I say it again."

A new light seemed to penetrate Windy Rube's brain.

"Didn't the girl like him?" he asked.

"I think not. Six months ago she told me that there was one man at Bowie Bar whom she despised."

"Was that man Stanislaus Steve?"

"Yes."

"Six months ago, eh?" And then Windy Rube burst into a laugh. "I've known women ter change their minds in less than six minutes."

"But I am satisfied that Myra did not."

"Thet's some consolation picked out ov ther wreck," said the ruffian. "Now, do you think

Myra ever thought anything of the Tahoe Infant?"

"She did."

Windy Rube recoiled a step.

"That almost discounts her goin' off with Stanislaus," he said. "The girl in love with a fool? What's goin' ter happen next?"

Modoc Kate seemed about to reply with spirit, but from some unknown cause she choked her answer down.

"I'll find him—I'll find 'em both!" continued the California rough. "I'll get at the bottom of this mystery with one of three things—lasso, bowie, or revolver! No man steals in this camp, without payin' a thousand times over for the property taken! Gone off together, hey? May I die a parson if I don't know why! I'm more than devil when I'm mad, an' I'm madder just now than I've ever been! By Jupiter! I could choke the girl for even lookin' at the camp whelp, Stanislaus!"

He did not give the woman a chance to make a reply, but whirled toward his horse and seated himself in the saddle without touching the stirrup.

The next second he was riding toward that portion of Bowie Bar where he had left his pards a short time before, and Modoc Kate followed him with a pair of strangely gleaming eyes.

"Stanislaus Steve is neither coward nor fool, Windy Rube!" she said, while she watched him. "You will have your hands full if you attempt to rob him of the prize he's carried off. But, what did you do to the Infant when you met him 'twixt here and Carson? You kept something back from me. I could see that by your manner and your looks. I can tell you one thing: If you think I was ever jealous of Mountain Myra, you're the fool of Bowie Bar. Me jealous of that girl? Ha! ha!"

Night came down over the gold camp, and in the largest and most frequented drinking-house in it, Windy Rube and his five pards, with other congenial spirits, were giving vent to words more emphatic and expressive than elegant.

"We've sot ther trap, now let 'em come!" cried Windy Rube. "I long ter see Flash Dan an' his Injun pard ride inter Bowie Bar. Ef it wasn't for their comin', I'd be off arter Stanislaus an' Myra. Ef the Nevada Nabob doesn't git hyar by to-morrow night, I'm off anyhow. Hello! Kate!"

At that moment the figure of Modoc Kate appeared in the doorway, and the next she was crossing the room, her intensely black eyes riveted on Windy Rube.

She did not speak until she had halted in front of him, and then, as she clutched his arm, she hissed:

"I am told, mountain devil, that you killed the Tahoe Infant. If this is true, I'll have the blood that courses through your heart!"

The spectators stepped back aghast, and for a moment the desperado of Bowie Bar stood white and speechless before the woman.

"Who told you?" he suddenly demanded.

"No difference who. Is it true? You acknowledge that you encountered him 'twixt here and Carson. Did you kill him?"

"Just as if I fight boys!" said Windy Rube.

"What is that big boy to you, Kate?"

"You dare not answer me!" she flashed.

"But I will find out for myself. If he is dead, woe to the man that shed his blood!"

She said no more, and before anybody could detain her, she was gone.

"She's goin' on the trail," said Windy Rube to his friends. "She mustn't find the Infant's corpse. That woman is capable of doin' anything. Solid Saul, you ar' my friend. Saddle a fresh horse an' beat that she wild-cat to the spot. I'd like ter know what the Infant is to her."

CHAPTER VIII.

MODOC KATE'S QUEST.

OVER the mountain trail between Bowie Bar and Carson City, or toward the Nevada line, dashed a horse that carried a female rider.

Modoc Kate was doing just what Windy Rube feared she would do, she was on her way to the spot where he had left the Tahoe Infant lying across the trail.

Her eyes blazed with eagerness, and she continually spoke to her horse to urge him on to greater efforts.

Night had fallen over the gold hills some time before, and Modoc Kate seemed to be the only person abroad.

If she should find the Infant dead, woe to the man who had shed his blood!

But the woman was not the only person traveling that same trail.

Some distance ahead of her rode a man, and in the same direction.

It was Solid Saul, the mountain rough, and the man commissioned by Windy Rube to keep ahead of Modoc Kate, and to prevent her from finding the Tahoe Infant murdered.

Nobody had tried to prevent the woman from leaving Bowie Bar.

What was the use, when Solid Saul, well-mounted and resolute, was ahead of her?

It was a long ride to the spot where Windy Rube, leader of the Banded Blades, had shot the big, good-natured boy down in cold blood.

By dint of hard riding and good-luck, Solid Saul expected to reach it by daylight, and have ample time to remove the evidences of Windy Rube's dastardly crime.

Here and there the hoofs of his horse struck fire from the trail rocks, and he listened more than once for the person whom he believed to be behind him.

Solid Saul had good-luck and did excellent riding, for he reached the spot sought just as daylight revealed it.

He saw the familiar rocks, the climbing vines, the narrow trail.

Eagerly he looked for the Tahoe Infant, but the boy had disappeared!

Solid Saul sprang from his horse upon the very spot where he had seen the boy drop before the flash of the deadliest revolver in the land of gold.

"He isn't hyer, thet's apparent," said the rough, speaking aloud. "Hyar's whar he dropped when Windy touched the trigger, an' hyar's whar he laid still. Not hyar now! Wonder what's become of him?"

As there was no answer to this interrogative, Solid Saul could only speculate, and he was not good on mysteries.

There was a trace of blood on the trail, that was all; but something more than this puzzled and mystified the man from Bowie Bar.

Around the spot where the Tahoe Infant had fallen, the tracks of one or more horses were distinctly visible.

Solid Saul was satisfied that they had not been made by the steeds of the Banded Blades.

Who, then, had been there?

He scrutinized the tracks carefully, measured them with his big bronze hand, and attacked the mystery again; but with no success.

"Thunder an' guns! let it go!" he exclaimed, rising with the air of a man disgusted and mad. "I'll go back an' report thet Modoc Kate didn't find ther Infant. Thet'll be report enough. I'll not go inter details an' I'll offer no explanations. Come, Trailer, we'll turn up the mountain hyar an' take a snooze; arter thet, back ter Bowie Bar."

He went up a bridlepath that ascended gradually from the main trail with his horse following at his heels, and some distance above the hunted spot, he threw himself under a mountain bush, and left the steed to stand guard while he slept.

The ride he had taken would try the best constitution, and Solid Saul had a right to rest after it.

If he had known, however, that the woman who had ridden from Bowie Bar, not a very great distance behind him, was very near at hand, he might have watched instead of indulging in sleep.

Modoc Kate had an idea where the Tahoe Infant had suffered at Windy Rube's hands.

The man who had informed her had not said that the leader of the Blades had shot him in cold blood, nor had he given her the exact location of the spot; but he had told her enough to start her alone from the Bar on the best horse in it after night.

Galloping down the trail in the broadening light of morning, came Modoc Kate, her black eyes seeing everything, her senses all on the alert.

All at once she caught sight of the scene of the Infant's place of misfortune.

She seemed to recognize it from the little bits of description she had wormed from the member of the Six.

"It was here somewhere," she said to herself.

"Iron Grip wouldn't tell me exactly, but he gave me a pointer or two. I'm near the place where something happened to that boy. Heigho! What's this?"

Modoc Kate had reined in her horse on the very spot where the big boy had struck the earth, and with eyes ablaze with excitement she was leaning over the saddle.

"It was here! I have found the spot!" she exclaimed. "Those dark stains on the ground are blood. Here's where Windy Rube shed my—the Infant's blood!"

If the boss of Bowie Bar had appeared to Modoc Kate at that moment, he would not have fared well, for the woman had almost unconsciously drawn and cocked a revolver.

"Simple and homeless he is, but he's much to me," she went on. "If they have killed him, perdition shall take them all!"

She alighted and examined the stains which Solid Saul had failed to obliterate before going up the mountain for a snooze.

"Blood it is, and the boy's!" fell from her lips. "The cowards hid him after they had done their work. Ah! did they think of me?"

Modoc Kate went back to her horse, who suddenly pricked up his ears and looked up the mountain.

"What is it?" she asked as she followed the animal's gaze. "Have you discovered something? Ah! I see it, too!"

At that very moment the woman caught sight of a horse's head among the mountain bushes some distance along the trail, and the two steeds

were staring at each other with singular curiosity.

There were no wild horses in that region, and the owner of the one overhead must be somewhere near, dead or alive.

"I'll see what it means. I came here to discover something," said Modoc Kate to herself, and a minute later she was climbing the mountain path afoot with the revolver clutched in her right hand.

Almost abruptly she came upon the full figure of the horse whose head she had seen from below, and then she saw the figure stretched at full length under the bushes.

Modoc Kate recoiled with a low ejaculation of surprise.

"You were in camp last night," she said eying the rough still asleep.

"You heard me tell Windy Rube that I would have the blood of the man who touched the Tahoe Infant. What fetched you hither so soon? I will find out, Solid Saul."

She stepped toward the sleeping rough, watching him like a tigress all the while, and when within five feet of his hasty bed, she leaned forward and sharply spoke his name.

In an instant the sleeper's eyelids parted, and the following second he was staring into the revengeful face of Modoc Kate.

"Great Jehu! what fetched you hyar?" cried Solid Saul.

"The same thing that took you so hastily from Bowie Bar, I'm thinking," was the quick retort.

"There! you need not get upon your feet, but sit still as you are. I came here to see what Windy Rube and you fellows did with the Tahoe Infant. You were in Bowie Bar when I faced Rube at the counter; now you are here. Your ride means something. Windy Rube sent you ahead of me?"

Solid Saul gave Modoc Kate a defiant smile in answer, and got up in despite the menace of eye and revolver.

"Won't you talk?" flashed the woman. "Look into this and give me civil answers, and the rough saw a revolver thrust into his face."

"What have you done with the Tahoe Infant?"

"Me! nothin'. I haven't seen him since I left the Bar."

"But you saw him after you and your pards left Carson?"

"Mebbe so."

"What happened then?"

Solid Saul grinned and said:

"This ar' no court an' I'm not on the witness stand. Jewhilliky crickets! woman; you're tryin' ter pump water out of a dry well. I'm no peacher."

Modoc Kate said nothing, but stepped back coolly and with resolution in her eyes.

She did not pause until about ten feet separated her from the rough.

"I give you one minute to begin the true story of how the Tahoe Infant was treated by the Banded Blades," she said in the sternest of tones. "Now, sir, proceed!"

"Look hyer," blurted the ruffian. "I'm no fool an' you know better than ter use the trigger, ag'in' one of the six pards. You won't shoot me, Kate, an' I won't give the boss away."

"You won't?"

"No!"

"Then, by heaven, I'll never ask you again, Solid Saul; but you shall never utter any more the boast just made. The Tahoe Infant is much to me, you and your pards—trash!"

With the last word the report of a pistol smote the air, and Solid Saul of Bowie Bar lay dead at the feet of Modoc Kate!

The woman had kept her threat—the rough would never repeat his boast again!

For a minute, while the deadly revolver smoked in her hand, Modoc Kate looked at the figure lying bloody and still in the shadow of the bush.

"These mountain devils don't know me, but they'll find me out," she murmured. "I have but one thing to live for in this world, and they have struck me where it hurts most. I am Modoc Kate, it is true, Solid Saul; but I am not all tigress, although I have taken your worthless life."

She ceased and walked away, nor stopped until she had reached the horse that waited for her on the trail below.

"We'll go back to the Bar, but we'll take our own time to it," she said addressing the animal, and a few moments later Modoc Kate was riding slowly toward the gold hills haunt of the Banded Blades.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED AT SUNDOWN.

"THEY won't come to-night. Look! thar goes the sun! The trap is set, but Flash Dan has backed out. He an' his red-skinned pard ar' goin' ter keep away from Bowie Bar. He hasn't forgot how we tied 'im ter Lonely Jack five years ago an' sent 'em ter the mountains. No, they won't come, I say, tharfore I'm off on my hunt. I'm goin' ter find Stanislaus an' Mountain Myra."

Of course the speaker was Windy Rube, leader of the Banded Blades, and he had just put down an empty glass on the counter of "The Smiling

Corpse," the most pretentious drinking den at the Bar.

He faced, or was surrounded by, the majority of the camp's inhabitants, and by glancing from the open door he could see the sun fast sinking out of sight.

"I won't wait any longer for Solid Saul's report," he went on. "Mebbe both he an' Modoc Kate took a notion ter go on ter Carson. Saul warn't much for pullin' out when we did leave. Wal, I'm goin'."

He stepped toward the door, but stopped suddenly, turned to the hard crowd, and continued:

"If Flash Dan should come while I'm away, entertain 'im in some manner till I get back. Remember that I'm ter be hyer when the trap's sprung."

"All right, Windy. Ar' you goin' alone?" called out Faro Phil.

"Sartainly. Just as if I couldn't deal with Stanislaus Steve without any help!" was the quick retort. "Take keer of Number One till I waltz back. Ta, ta! my gentle rustlers ov the gold hills!" And with his coarse laugh sounding in their ears, the men of Bowie Bar saw Windy Rube vanish through the door.

"I'll find the runaways, too," he said in resolute tones to himself, as he moved toward the corral. "I have yet to hunt a man I didn't find. Oh! I'm worse than a wolf, on the trail!"

He had saddled a well-limbed black horse, and was about to mount when a young man stepped forward and confronted him.

"You're the fresh what came inter camp t'other night while I war on the trail 'twixt here an' Carson, ain't you?" queried Windy Rube, as he leaned forward and scanned the person addressed from head to foot.

"I came to Bowie Bar the other night," was the modest reply.

"Nugget Ned, I hear yer name is?"

"That's what I'm called."

The ruffian's confronter was a youth perhaps twenty year, of age, well built, well dressed, and with the gleam of honesty and fearlessness in his dark eyes.

"You're off on a trail, I hear," he continued, seeing that Windy Rube did not speak on.

"You wouldn't like company, would you?"

The Blade laughed at first, but seeing that the young speaker was in earnest, he soon cooled down.

"Do you want ter go along?" he asked.

"I do."

"It isn't yer hunt, boy."

"Maybe not; but I'm always ready to do something that has excitement in it."

"Whar did you come from hyar?"

"From Sacramento."

"What's yer business in these parts?"

"Can't say that I have any in particular. I want excitement and adventure. There ar' some things a person always wants ter forget."

"Ginerally," said Windy Rube, significantly. "Hev ye been fightin' the tiger, an' lost?"

Under the penetrating glances of the rough, the eyes of the young man drooped.

"I understand it," laughed Rube. "Bu'sted fellers often turn up in camp. They stay hyar a while an' then move on, for it doesn't take a year for 'em to diskiver thet Bowie Bar ar' no hospital for plucked pigeons—no siree!"

"But I was cheated out of my money," said the youth with spirit and resentment.

"You played didn't you?"

"Yes."

"An' war cheated! Ov course! The first time a young chick loses at the table he's apt ter swear that it wasn't fair. I war thar years ago, my young friend. Yes, ov course you war cheated."

The sarcasm in Windy Rube's voice was cold, but as cutting as a north wind.

Nugget Ned winced under it and stepped back.

"An' so you'd like ter go with me—ter trail the same man I'm goin' ter trail?" continued the Blade.

"I asked permission to do so when I first came up, but now I believe I'll remain here."

"That's sensible. I couldn't take you anyhow. I would advise you ter leave the Bar as soon as possible."

"Why?"

"Because the boys don't take well ter fleeced sheep," grinned Windy Rube. "I don't think you'd be able ter get along hyar. Do you think you would?"

"I do. I've dwelt in more than one camp. Truth to say, I've been brought up among the gold-diggers of these mountains."

"An' got plucked at Sacramento?"

"I admit that."

"Hang me ef thet looks plausible. Men who hang around the placer camps, don't generally swamp themselves when they get to the cities."

Nugget Ned's eyes seemed to flash.

"You don't doubt my word?" he cried.

"Ov course not. I just made a natural remark—that was all," answered Windy Rube. "You go off like powder sometimes, don't you?"

The young man blushed.

"Thet'll never win in this quarter ov ther moral vin'yard," laughed the Blade. "A cool

head hyar means a whole skin. Goin' off like a flash never won yet, it's poor policy. But I'm off."

The last word had scarcely been spoken, when Windy Rube settled down in the saddle, and from his perch he looked down into the face of the new addition to Bowie Bar.

"If you ar' bound ter sojourn at Bowie, mind what I just said about a cool head an' a whole skin," he continued. "Silence is the capital prize in the lottery at Bowie Bar. It's in yer hands, young man. A still tongue ties a trigger. I'm gone now. Good-night!"

Nugget Ned saw the black steed bound forward without any apparent command, and the next moment he saw Windy Rube riding rapidly away.

"I was a fool for asking his permission to go with him," he said to himself. "I might have known that he would refuse. Well, I'm here and I might as well wait till he comes back. He wouldn't believe my story of my losses; he judges everybody by himself. I didn't lie to him, though, but I was a fool to risk my money among the monte sharps of Sacramento. It was the first, and is the last time! By my life! I will never risk another dollar on a monte table!"

"That's a sensible conclusion," said a voice so near that Nugget Ned turned and found himself confronted by a stalwart man in dark clothes with a silver-braided shirt-front and a light-colored sombrero.

He had apparently just come to town, for there was dust on his boots from heel to strap.

"Keep that promise an' you'll pull through," the tall man went on, stepping closer to the youth.

"So this is Bowie Bar?"

"It is."

"Do you belong hyar?"

"No."

"A pilgrim an' stranger, then?"

"To a certain extent."

"So am I, though I'm not unacquainted hyar."

Nugget Ned thought he saw the speaker's eyes flash.

"I didn't know a soul when I struck this camp," he said smiling. "And I'm no better acquainted now."

"But you war talkin' ter somebody just before I came up."

"Yes—to Windy Rube."

The sombrero started.

"Has he left Bowie Bar?"

"Yes—gone away on a trail."

"Then I'm too late in one respect," he said as if talking to himself. "He won't be gone long mebbe?"

"He doesn't expect to, I believe."

"Oh, well, mebbe I'll be hyar when he gits back."

The youth made no reply.

He was looking at the man who had evidently come to Bowie Bar for a purpose.

He was striking enough to command attention anywhere, and Nugget Ned wondered if he had not seen him before.

The longer he gazed the stronger became this belief; he certainly had met the handsome sport somewhere, but, for his life, he could not settle on time or occurrence.

"Has this mountain paradise got a public house?" suddenly asked the big stranger.

"It has several, such as they are; but they are whisky holes and monte dens."

"Ov course. At which one do the gold cherubs most congregate? Show me the place."

"I'll do that. Come this way."

Nugget Ned started off, but before he had taken three steps the sport's hand fell upon his arm.

"One moment," he said. "Do you know a young girl here called Mountain Myra?"

"I don't know her, but you won't find her in camp to-night."

"Why not?"

"Because she left the other night—run off, they say, with one of the meanest ruffians east of the coast."

"Impossible! It can't be!" exclaimed the sport. "Who did she go with?"

"A man called Stanislaus Steve."

"That camp galoot? Why he's the coward who banished the Tahoe Infant!"

"I don't know about that. I know that Windy Rube has just started after the runaways."

The big sport was silent for a moment then he exclaimed.

"By Jerusalem! you're a little too late, Flash Dan."

CHAPTER X.

FLASH DAN AMONG THE LIONS.

It was true that Flash Dan, the Nevada Nabob, had come to Bowie Bar, and apparently alone.

He had entered the trap set for him by the six most desperate spirits of the camp, but under the instructions issued by Windy Rube just before he departed on his trail, the trap was not to be sprung immediately.

The gold men were to detain Flash Dan in camp until Windy Rube got back.

"Too late, I am," continued the Nabob while Nugget Ned watched him and admired his splendid physique and fearlessness. "So the girl has gone off with Stanislaus, eh? What's yer opinion about it, young man?"

"I haven't any," was the answer. "I haven't been here long enough to get the lay of the land."

"Wal, what do they say when they talk about it? Did she go with him willingly?"

"They seem to think she did."

"Wal, I don't," said Flash Dan promptly.

"Mind you, I never saw Mountain Myra in all my life, but I'll bet my teeth that she didn't go with Stanislaus Steve on the square. She either b'lieved a lie, or went by force."

The youth looked at him in mute surprise.

"For a copper I'd follow Windy Rube, but I guess I'll take in Bowie Bar first," Flash Dan went on. "Whar did you say I'd find the most prominent citizens of the place?"

Nugget Ned hesitated now.

It was for this very man that a trap had been set; he had picked up enough information to know that the Banded Blades were eager for him to make his appearance at the Bar.

Why not warn him?—why not stop him where he was?

Nugget Ned was on the eve of doing this, when something held him back.

Flash Dan was no coward; there was something in his look which told the youth that the warning would be rejected with scorn, and he kept it back.

"If you want to precipitate matters, I will show you where it can be done," he said, to himself, as he looked into Flash Dan's face, and a moment later he led the Nevada Nabob from the place of meeting.

The youth had not been long at Bowie Bar, but long enough, however, to become pretty well acquainted with it, and he walked toward the place where the Bowies generally congregated after sundown.

Once or twice he glanced up at the Nabob and found him each time at his side.

Flash Dan was perfectly cool, but somewhat eager to find the men of Bowie Bar.

"Hyar's ter Windy's success an' ter Flash Dan's visit!" suddenly rung out a loud voice which made the two men exchange looks.

"What! are they lookin' for me?" asked the Nevada sport.

"They are. There's a trap of some kind set for you," said Nugget.

"A trap for Flash Dan?" laughed the Nabob.

"Yes."

"Who set it?"

"Windy Rube and pards."

"But the head one's left, you say?"

"Yes; he thought you wouldn't come so soon."

"I'm hyar, though." And Flash Dan seemed to quicken his pace.

If there was a trap set for him, he appeared eager to enter it and to get caught.

"Just as I expected," murmured the youth. "He will go on, now that he knows the danger."

The voice which had startled both men came from a large shanty just ahead.

The door was open and in the light beyond could be seen the figures of a number of men.

"They're all together," said Flash Dan, as they approached the resort. "If they're not lookin' for me so soon, I'll surprise them."

A minute later the giant figure of the Nevada Nabob appeared on the threshold, and he stood there for a brief time surveying the scene before him.

The room was more than half-filled by a motley crowd of big and desperate-looking fellows, just the kind of spirits who are to be found among the gold camps of the Sierra, lawless, dark-faced, fierce.

"They'll see him in a moment—then look out," said Nugget Ned, as he surveyed the fearless sport. "They won't obey Windy Rube, they'll spring the trap on him right away."

Flash Dan was not permitted to remain long in the door without being discovered; it was impossible.

All at once one of the pards of Bowie Bar espied him.

"Thar he is now! Thar's Flash Dan!" he cried.

It is needless to say that every eye fell instantly upon the splendid figure of the Nevada Nabob.

More than one dark hand crept toward a revolver at sight of him.

Flash Dan did not move.

He stood erect in the doorway, his arms folded across his ample breadth of chest, and his eagle eyes taking in the striking tableau that presented itself in the neighborhood of the counter.

For several moments this look and counter look went on or until it appeared ludicrous to the man from Nevada.

"I thought I'd take in Bowie Bar. I b'lieve I hed an invitation to come," he suddenly said.

The Banded Blades looked at each other, non-plused and ill at ease.

"You're welcome hyar, ov course," said Faro Phil, coming to the rescue of all, much to their relief.

"Glad ter hear that I am," was the answer and Flash Dan came forward. "Gentlemen, if

CHAPTER XI.

MODOC KATE'S DISCOVERY.

you will nominate yer favorite decoction, we'll tip glasses to the general welfare ov humanity."

Time had never been when an inhabitant of Bowie Bar went back on a treat.

"I'm sorry that you're not all at home," continued Flash Dan addressing himself mainly to Faro Phil at whom he looked particularly while he spoke. "I've learned since strikin' the town that business has called Windy Rube away."

"Yes, but he'll be back inside ov forty-eight hours," was the answer.

"You'll make yerself at home hyar, Dan. You won't find the varied amusements hyar thet one finds in Carson, but we're not slow on the sport, nor stingy when it comes ter bettin' our dust."

A quiet smile appeared at the corners of Flash Dan's mouth, a sparkle in his eyes.

"Oh, I'll get along!" he said. "I never fail ter make myself at home wherever I am. Hyer we go with the first installment! Down with yer ratsbane, men ov Bowie. May we never pass in our last chips till we hev ter, ho! ho!"

Flash Dan tipped his glass as he finished, and was followed by the entire crowd.

Nugget Ned could not but be amazed at the wonderful coolness of the man who had boldly entered the den where a score of men hated him with an intensity not to be described.

He was the equal of any one in physical strength, and his mien told that he would shrink from no danger however menacing.

But in the midst of the desperadoes of the gold camp he was in imminent peril, and Nugget Ned knew that if Windy Rube was there, the death-trap would be sprung at once.

But what would his pards do?

The youth had not followed Flash Dan into the den, but from where he stood he could see everything that was taking place.

He saw the men of the Bar drink with the gold Nabob, and heard the clear ring of the double-eagle which he threw upon the counter to pay the score.

He was wondering what would follow when a step at his side attracted his attention and he was turning when a hand alighted on his shoulder.

"What's going on in there?" asked a voice just as Nugget Ned caught sight of a dress and a pair of eager eyes.

"It is the woman they call Modoc Kate," he ejaculated to himself then he answered:

"Don't you know? The man called Flash Dan has just come to the Bar."

Modoc Kate threw a quick look toward the scene presented beyond the open door of the whisky ranch.

"Do you know him?" asked the youth.

"N—no; but the name is not an unfamiliar one. Flash Dan! The Nevada Nabob they call him in some places. Has he tackled Windy Rube?"

"No; Windy Rube has left camp."

"What took him away?"

"The trail of Stanislaus Steve."

"Then I am too late to see him and to settle with him," was the fiercely spoken answer.

"What can have fetched Flash Dan to Bowie Bar?"

"I never inquired, but there's a trap set for him."

"A trap? and by the Banded Blades?"

"Yes."

"They'd better look out or their trap will never be sprung," almost hissed the woman.

"What's going to happen now?"

At that moment two men slipped out of the shanty and walked to a spot of shade where they drew close together.

"They're adjusting the trigger of their infernal trap," whispered Modoc Kate with a glance at Nugget Ned. "I know Big Bart and Grizzly Dick well enough to know that when they put their heads together in that way something dark's in the wind."

Suddenly the clicks of two revolvers were distinctly heard.

"That means death," murmured Nugget Ned.

The next second he saw Modoc Kate start forward, straight toward the two men.

Her step gave forth no sound, for she had the quick, springy tread of the panther.

All at once she halted between the two pards and caused them to recoil at sight of her.

"Jehu! Modoc Kate!" they exclaimed.

"Yes, fresh from the ground where the blood of the Tahoe Infant was brutally shed!" she hissed, looking them sternly in the eye, and then her hands darted out and closed on the right wrist of each. "Look here! There's a dark scheme afoot at Bowie Bar, but while I'm here it sha'n't be carried out. You spring no trap on Flash Dan this night!"

"Who said we war up ter thet?" growled Grizzly Dick sullenly.

"No difference who! these revolvers tell the story."

"Oho! so you champion the man from Nevada? Modoc Kate, ef you knew what happened in Nugget City five years ago you wouldn't appear hyar as Flash Dan's pard."

"I know it all, and in face of it I say that you shall spring no trap on him to-night. Beware! I've spotted every mother's son of you!"

And the next moment she stepped back and walked away, leaving the men transfixed with astonishment.

"PERDITION an' powder!" grated Big Bart as he gazed after the cool woman who had balked their purpose with a threat. "Let's foller her an' make her keep her hand out ov this game."

"Not to-night; let her go," was the answer.

"Then we're ter hold back our hand, and no trap's ter be sprung on Flash Dan?"

"None unless he precipitates matters. We'll go back ter the shanty." And putting up their revolvers while they still glared like lions at Modoc Kate, the two desperadoes walked back to the den.

"I balked them—see!" whispered the woman at Nugget Ned's side. "They were hatching up an infamous scheme against the man from Nevada; they had their weapons cocked in their hands. I struck them in the nick of time."

"Won't they do it yet?"

"They'd better not," and Modoc Kate's eyes shone madly. "They know me, and they know, too, that when I said 'beware' I meant it."

She had turned and was gazing after the two men who had reached the door of the den and were about to enter.

They did not do so, however, for the figure of Flash Dan appeared in it, and Nugget Ned and his companion heard him say to the men at his back:

"I'll see you later, men. I may take a notion to stay awhile at Bowie Bar, since the society appears congenial an' the atmosphere seems healthy. Good place this! Satan's soul! if I had known it, I'd hev struck it before this."

Grizzly Dick and Big Bart had drawn aside into the shadow of the shanty, and Nugget Ned could imagine their eyes flashing while they glared at the Nabob with their bronzed fingers at the butts of their revolvers or bowies.

A moment afterward Flash Dan emerged from the saloon, and came straight toward the spot where the youth stood.

"So that is the Nevada Nabob?" whispered Kate.

"Yes. Do you see him for the first time to-night?"

"Heavens! I saved that man's life once!" exclaimed the Trigger Queen, starting back.

"Where?"

"In San Francisco; but he wasn't Flash Dan then. He was called Dark Dan, and—"

"Wal, I'm back safe, Nugget," broke in the gold Nabob with a laugh, as he halted before the youth, but without seeing the woman who had recoiled, and who stood a few feet away gazing at him speechless from astonishment.

"The lions didn't rend you," said Ned.

"No, but a few showed their teeth, an' growled a little behind them. Oh, I'm used to thet," and Flash Dan smiled again. "You war right; Windy Rube isn't in camp. Mebbe I'll stay till he comes back."

Nugget Ned seemed to think of Modoc Kate before he spoke again.

"I have a friend here," he said turning half-way around. "Flash Dan, this is Modoc Kate of Bowie Bar."

The Nevada Nabob uttered an ejaculation of surprise, but stepped forward and stopped in front of the Trigger Queen.

"Gods! it is he sure enough!" cried Modoc Kate. "This is not our first meeting, Dark Dan."

"I should say it wasn't, if you call me by that name. Whar have we met before?"

"In San Francisco."

"When?"

"Nearly seven years ago, or the night the roughs from Siskiyou county set a trap for you. Do you remember the letter that warned you?"

"I do."

"I wrote that letter," said the woman proudly.

"Then, I will thank you for it hyar," cried Flash Dan, in his deep rich voice, and his big dark hands were held out to the woman who laid her own hands in them. "They had the bulge on me that night, an' I didn't know it till the letter came. I've heard ov Modoc Kate a good deal ov late, but I did not dream thet I had her to thank for thet little favor done in 'Frisco."

"No thanks," said the Trigger Queen. "I would have done the same for any menaced man. I warn you to be careful here."

"Oh, I shall," laughed Flash Dan. "These gold galoots arn't goin' ter steal a march on this Nevada chick. If they try it, it'll be the dearest march they ever stole."

Back of his long dark lashes his black eyes flashed resolution and defiance.

"If they think I came across the Sierra alone they're badly fooled," he went on after a moment's pause.

"I'll show them a pard who ain't ter be fooled with."

"Not to-night; let them cool down."

Flash Dan was silent for a moment.

"Do you think my comin' r'iled 'em much?" he asked.

"I know it did. We saw more standing here then you did in the whisky den," said Modoc Kate glancing at the youth. "Where is the pard you speak of?"

"One mile out o' camp performin' a deed ov mercy ef he does wear a red skin."

"Then he is an Indian?"

"Yes."

"At sight of him the men of Bowie Bar would go wild. They hate a red-skin as they hate perdition's pains. For the sake of harmony don't fetch your Indian pard into camp."

Flash Dan looked curiously into the speaker's face.

"For harmony, eh? All right!" he exclaimed. "If I fetch Crested Hawk inter camp, suthin' will turn up, eh? I understand thet; but by George! I'd pit that very red-skin ag'in' all the lions thet inhabit this mountain den. Would you like ter see him?"

Neither Modoc Kate nor Nugget Ned expressed a desire to see the copper-colored pard who had been left on the outside of the camp, but Flash Dan was determined that they should.

"It's a short mile," he said. "I'd hev fetched 'im along ef I didn't want somebody ter stay with the boy we picked up on the trail on our road hyer."

"What boy?" cried Modoc Kate eagerly. "Heavens! did you find my—did you find the Tahoe Infant? Tell me!"

"Thet's just who we picked up an' nobody else," was the reply.

"Alive?"

"Alive, but bullet grazed, an' out of his head."

It seemed that Modoc Kate's teeth cracked.

"They shall suffer for this, especially the wretch who did the deed!" she hissed.

"Who did it? Do you know? Ther Infant can't tell."

"Windy Rube! It is the work of that villain!"

"An' it's in keepin' with his hull life," replied Flash Dan. "He's the chick I came hyar ter see next to the rose ov Bowie Bar."

Modoc Kate did not seem to hear the Nabob's last sentence.

"Where is the boy?" she exclaimed. "Show me the simple one shot like a dog by the boss of this gold camp an' its black-hearted pards."

"He's whar the Injin is. Come on." And Flash Dan darted away, followed eagerly by Modoc Kate and Nugget Ned.

In less than five minutes the party of three had left the camp proper and had struck the stage trail which led to Carson City.

Modoc Kate kept at the Nabob's side, and wished he would increase his gait, but he was not in the hurry that urged her on.

No halt was made until Flash Dan reached a certain spot cast in dark shadow by overhanging rocks, and with a smile he turned to the couple who accompanied him.

"We'll see the Infant an' his guard in a minute," he said, and a moment later he led the way into a dark cleft in the trail's stone wall.

Of course the opening was but the threshold of a retreat of some kind, and the eyes of all were soon gladdened by the soft light of a torch or lamp that burned some distance ahead.

Modoc Kate started forward with a light cry of joy, but the hand of Flash Dan held her back.

"I wouldn't," he said, with an admonitory smile. "That Injun's keener than a catamount." And clutching Kate's wrist, the Nabob led her toward the light.

At the same time the three entered the underground room lighted by a torch, and the Trigger Queen broke suddenly from the Nabob's grip and rushed forward.

Dan and Ned saw her drop beside an object lying on a blanket, and after a moment's inspection of it look toward them with uplifted hand enjoining silence.

Flash Dan glided forward without a particle of noise and bent over the figure on the blanket.

"The Tahoe Infant! though I never saw him before," murmured Nugget Ned.

Yes, it was the big, fat boy of Bowie Bar, with a handkerchief about his head, and fast asleep.

"It is he!" whispered Modoc Kate, gladly, as she looked thankfully into Flash Dan's face.

"Who else could it hev been? But whar's thet Injun? What has become ov Crested Hawk?"

He threw an inquisitive look about the cavern when he finished, but there was no reply.

"I'll see what the Infant knows," he said, and before Modoc Kate could interpose, he had shaken the boy out of his slumbers.

"Whar's the Hawk?" he asked.

For a minute the boy did not seem to comprehend the question; at best, he was not more than half awake.

"Tell him, if you know," said Modoc Kate's melodious voice at his ear. "Flash Dan, your friend, wants to know where the Indian is."

Then the answer came as if the Tahoe Infant had suddenly caught the interrogative.

"He went to find Flash Dan," he said. "He said he stayed too long."

"Jehosaphat! that red-skin alone at Bowie Bar?" cried Flash Dan, as he sprung up. "Thet's ag'in' my orders; he war ter stay hyar. I did overstay my time at ther Bar—thet's a fact. But he mustn't be thar alone."

Flash Dan wheeled toward the opening.

"I'll go with you!" said Nugget Ned instantly, placing himself at his side.

"You? You're a boy! The lions ov Bowie Bar 'll chaw you up in a minute! No; stay hyar. I'll find Crested Hawk alone!" And then there were but three people in the cavern, for Flash Dan was gone!

It was true that the Indian had gone back to the wild gold camp.

At the same moment that found Flash Dan giving utterance to his determination to seek the Klamath, that copper-colored individual stepped fearlessly across the threshold of the famous whisky den, not one of whose frequenters had yet departed.

With a searching glance, he advanced toward the counter stared at by forty of the most desperate-looking men that ever drew a bowie.

"Flash Dan's Injun!" grated Grizzly Dick. "The Greaser's lookin' for his pard now. They've missed connection somewhar on the route. By Jehu! I'm for initiating the red interther mysteries ov Bowie Bar!"

This proposition met with scores of dark looks of approval, but the Indian, not noticing them, came on.

The crowd made way for him, and he leaned over the counter with his eyes fixed on the man behind it.

"Whar's Flash Dan?" he asked.

"Gone up the flume!" laughed Grizzly Dick coarsely.

"White man lie!" was the hiss that answered, and as Crested Hawk whirled one hand clutched Grizzly Dick's throat, and the other whipped out the silver-handled bowie!

CHAPTER XII.

CRESTED HAWK'S SECURITY.

THE wild-looking inhabitants of the place started back breathless and aghast, rendered so by the Indian's sudden action.

Grizzly Dick was no infant; he was a powerful fellow, but he could not shake loose the hand that gripped his throat.

"Kill the Greaser!" suddenly cried some one. "He'll choke Dick to death. Blow the red-skin's head off!"

The uplifted bowie dropped, but it did not enter the desperado's breast.

"Talk to Crested Hawk when he wants your words!" cried the Klamath as he pushed the big ruffian away and turned his attention to the crowd. "Who says blow the Hawk's head off? He is here to find Flash Dan, his big white brother. He did not come for blood, but he turns his back on no man who wants to spill the Hawk's."

"That's just what I'll do if you don't make yerself almighty an' immediately scarce!" grated Grizzly Dick who came forward with fire in his eyes, and a cocked revolver in his swarthy hand. "Want Flash Dan, eh? I'll give you more than you want if you don't leave this ranch!"

The listeners glanced at the Indian, who eyed the ruffian without a sign of fear.

The two ene aies were not more than five feet apart, the moccasins of one almost touching the boots of the other.

"Oh, Jerusalem! let the Injun treat," laughed Faro Phil, throwing himself between red and white. "Whisky's better than blood any time. Hyar, Crested Hawk, tell the pards ter nominate their poison, an' see 'em waltz up ter the bar like a troop ov seraphs!"

"None for me; durn the Injun!" growled Grizzly Dick, half under his breath.

The crowd, eager a moment before to riddle Crested Hawk with bullets at a given signal, now took up the cue given by Faro Phil, and demanded, in vigorous language, that he should treat.

"Thet's right! drink with the red-flesher that war chokin' me a minute ago!" said Grizzly Dick, as he turned on his heel and walked toward the door. "You may do it, men ov Bowie Bar, but curse me if I ever will! Blast him! I'm not through with him yet. Gulp down his treat, but don't ask me ter help ye. I'd cut my throat first!"

And out he went, mad and desperate, grinding his teeth, and with the prints of the Klamath's fingers still visible on his throat.

The Indian found himself in a peculiar position.

The roughs of Bowie Bar were clamoring for a treat, and he had nothing with which to pay the score, if he acceded to their demands.

The last money he possessed had disappeared in the coffers of the monte banks of Carson City, and he had nothing of value on his person save the silver-handled bowie.

"Treat or travel!" suddenly cried the thirsty crowd, changing its tune. "Put down or put out. By Jingol we want no stinginess at Bowie Bar!"

A moment later, Crested Hawk brought a red clinched hand down with vehemence on the counter, and his eyes flashed with indignation when he looked at the man behind it.

"Give the white men liquor," he said. "The Hawk will pay!"

That seemed guarantee sufficient, for in a lit-

tle time numerous glasses and bottles decorated the counter, and the men of Bowie Bar poured out their drinks.

Without moving, the Indian watched the proceedings, seemingly the most unconcerned person in the place.

"Hyar's ter ye, red!" exclaimed Faro Phil, lifting his glass. "Before we drink, I'll inform ye that Flash Dan war hyar awhile ago, but thet he went off. Down with the decoction, pards!"

At the same moment more than a score of glasses were emptied, and thwack, thwack they came back to the counter.

"Flash Dan is Crested Hawk's banker," said the Indian, in reply to the bartender's solicitous and inquisitive glances. "Let the white man remember what the Indian owes. It shall be paid."

A laugh went up from the lips of the crowd at the discomfited countenance of the liquor-vender.

"Thet takes the cake for coolness," exclaimed Phil. "The Injun has done what no citizen ov Bowie Bar would hev had the cheek ter attempt. Flash Dan his banker? ho, ho!"

Whisky was fifty cents a drink at the Bar, and the keeper of the den did not like to lose the profits that belonged to the sale he had just made.

He colored, got white, then flushed again.

"When will Flash Dan pay?" he demanded.

"When Crested Hawk sees him."

"When will that be?"

"To-night!"

"Thet's nothin' but talk, an' it takes dust ter buy whisky for the thirsty pards ov Bowie Bar," growled the barkeeper. "I'd rather you would leave some security till the debt's paid. You've got a knife thar," and the speaker's greedy eyes alighted on the silver handle of the famous bowie that protruded above the Klamath's belt.

Crested Hawk glanced at it, too.

"Does white man b'lieve that the Hawk won't pay?" he asked.

"I didn't say that, but I'd like ter be secured—thet's all."

His eyes fell again to the knife, and the following moment the Indian's hand grasped the handsome hilt.

"Crested Hawk will leave it till he pays!" he cried.

Above the bar hung a mirror in a scaly gilt frame; it was the only ornament the place could boast of, and the summer flies had left it in a very unrepresentable condition.

Still, it was a mirror, and as it was the only one at the Bar, the owner set no little store upon it.

The Indian seemed to spy it for the first time when his hand fell upon the silver hilt of his bowie.

All at once the knife leaped from its fringed buckskin belt, and Crested Hawk caught the point between thumb and finger.

An instant later his right hand carried the weapon aloft, and it spun through the air toward the glass!

The throw was speedily succeeded by the noise of broken glass, and the men whose eyes had followed the knife saw it quivering in the center of the mirror, its point buried in the plank behind it.

It was the work of a moment.

"Knife sticks there till Crested Hawk pays!" said the red-skin coolly, with a glance from the horrified whisky-seller to the astonished crowd. "No hand but the Klamath's pulls it out." And with the last word he turned on his heel and walked with an air of triumph toward the door.

"Jehosaphat! cool as an ice-box!" ejaculated Faro Phil as the Indian stepped across the threshold. "With a pard like that I'd agree ter fight my way ter Mexico. Thar sticks the boss bowie ov Silver Land above thet bar. Great Caesar! what a thrower. At twenty yards he could drive thet blade through an inch plank!"

Nobody ventured to dispute the desperado's last assertion, but all gazed speechless at the knife driven through the mirror.

"I don't want many debts paid in thet manner," observed the bartender, as he surveyed the Indian's work. "Thar went a twenty-dollar lookin'-glass on a sixteen-dollar treat; no profit in thet. Confound it! why didn't some ov you riddle the red?"

"Why didn't you?" laughed one-half the crowd.

The bartender subsided.

"We didn't get to spring the trap on nary one ov the two," Faro Phil said. "We agreed ter wait till Windy Rube gets back. I kin wait, but thar's one man who'll spoil all onless he cools down."

"Who's thet?"

"Grizzly Dick. He'll feel the fingers ov the Injun at his throat for many a day. Gosh! didn't the Greaser turn like a flash! His hand war at Dick's windpipe before a man could think Jack Robinson. Whar did Flash Dan pick up thet red bruiser, anyhow. He's a dandy devil from perdition's plains, I think; an' I wouldn't advise Dick ter fool with him."

While Faro Phil was talking, there was stand-

ing in the shadows at the edge of the mining-

town a man who held a coil of rope in his right hand.

It was evident that he had chosen that exact position to wait for some one who, from his appearance, was expected to come from the camp.

A full moon was overhead, making the ground to all appearances a bed of molten silver, but the man with the lasso stood in the shade of rocks.

Like a thug waiting for a victim, he stood there as motionless as a statue; more than half-hidden by the shadow, he looked like one of India's strangling fanatics.

He stood for ten minutes without moving a muscle; the only sign of life about him was his flashing eyes, that threatened to betray him to the victim for whom he waited.

"Choked me, did he, in payment for my joke!" he grated in a low tone that sounded like a vengeful hiss. "Great Jupiter! but won't I pay the dirty Greaser for that chokin' ef he comes this way? When I toss my noose over his head he'll wish in a second thet he hed finished Grizzly Dick in the bar-room. I'd stand hyar till mornin' for a cast at him. Flash Dan's pard, eh? Wal, ef he comes, I'll proceed to make Nevada's Nabob pardless."

Five minutes afterward the man with the lasso started visibly for the first time since taking up position by the rocks.

A figure erect and perfect in outline was coming through the moonlight straight toward him.

Of course, such a figure belonged only to an Indian.

"I've got him!" parted Grizzly Dick's lips at sight of the approaching person. "Patience never failed me yet. Come on, my crimson hollyhock of the silver kentry. Hyar's the surest noose in California, an' it's for you!"

He stepped back a pace, and glanced at the lasso, then looked at the Indian.

It was Crested Hawk, sure enough, but Grizzly Dick did not know that he had left his dreaded bowie sticking in the mirror over the camp's best bar.

On came the Indian, glared at all the while with a tiger's ferocity by the swarthy lassoer who longed for revenge.

Without looking on either side, but straight ahead, Crested Hawk passed Grizzly Dick and went up the trail in the silvery moonlight.

"When you choke another citizen ov the gold lands, just inform me, will ye?" hissed Dick, stepping into the trail.

All at once the lasso began to describe circles about his head, and then it darted suddenly at its victim.

There never was a truer cast.

When Crested Hawk thought least of danger, the coil dropped over his head, and with an exclamation of triumph on the lassoer's part, he was suddenly jerked off his feet!

"Choked me for a joke, eh?" laughed the ruffian of Bowie Bar, as the lassoed Indian attempted to regain his equilibrium. "You've stirred up a regular hornets' nest in the person ov Grizzly Dick."

Despite his situation, the red-skin turned toward his lassoer at these words, and then darted toward him.

"I'll keep you off so that you'll not get ter use yer bowie on me!" cried Grizzly Dick, jerking at the cord. "Yes, just try ter throw that lasso off. Whar's yer silver-handled bowie? Did they rob ye ov it in the bar-room?"

Dick held the Klamath at a great disadvantage, and he suddenly jerked his victim to one side and against the rocks before he could guard himself.

Crested Hawk tripped and fell headlong among the boulders where he lay still like a person stunned.

"Got yer quietus, hev ye?" coarsely chuckled Grizzly Dick. "I'll drag ye into the light an' proceed ter pay ye fer thet chokin' at the bar."

He drew the Klamath from the boulders into the moonlight in no gentle manner and then started forward.

"Ef I don't make this the blackest night in yer history, Injun, shoot me for a gopher! I freeze ter vengeance when I get started. I'm one ov the Death Angels ov this neck o' the woods. Hello! hyar you ar'!"

Grizzly Dick stood over the red-skin, but only for a moment.

"Thet's my pard, sir!" said a cool, stern voice.

Grizzly Dick uttered an exclamation and recoiled.

He was confronted by Flash Dan!

CHAPTER XIII.

DESPERATE CUSTOMERS.

"WHAT'S the matter with the Indian, anyhow?" asked the Nevada Nabob looking into Grizzly Dick's face for a moment, and then glancing at the Klamath whose neck was still encircled with the desperado's lasso.

Grizzly Dick did not know what to say.

Flash Dan's question was full of biting sarcasm, and it certainly seemed superfluous.

What had happened?

Did not the lasso, one end of which was still in Grizzly Dick's hand, tell the story?

"No, you needn't try to tell me," continued Flash Dan in sterner tones. "Your lasso has attempted to strangle my Injun pard. If it had succeeded, Grizzly Dick, as they call you, I should now an' hyar call you to account."

"Confound it! he choked me," growled Dick. "Choked you, eh? an' without provocation ov course!"

"Durned nigh it. He came inter the Smilin' Corpse bar-room an' inquired for you, an' when I said you had gone up ther flume, he sent his red fingers behind my wind-pipe. No provocation thar, curse his pieter!" and Grizzly Dick threw upon the motionless Indian a look almost powerful enough to annihilate.

Flash Dan did not reply, but stooped and in a moment loosened the lasso and slipped the almost fatal noose over the red-skin's head.

Grizzly Dick made no motion to arrest him in his work, but quietly looked on while under his huge mustache he bit his lips quite savagely.

"Whar's his bowie?" suddenly asked the Nevada Nabob looking up into the rough's face.

"Hang me, if I know. He had plenty ov time ter hev cut the rope arter my cast, but he didn't offer ter do anything ov the kind."

"They robbed him ov it at the saloon!" flashed Dan.

"I don't know. He had it when he choked me."

"An' not when he got hyar?"

"I think not."

Flash Dan looked toward the main part of the camp for the space of several minutes without speaking.

He seemed on the eve of going back in quest of the silver-handled bowie, but he suddenly checked himself and said:

"Do you know when Windy Rube will get back, Grizzly?"

"Not exactly, but within three days, I think."

"With the girl?"

Grizzly Dick started.

"You see I know what took him away," smiled Flash Dan, "so you needn't think his goin' any secret. Now answer me."

"I think he will find Mountain Myra. Stanislaus Steve is no fool, though. He will show his teeth if cornered. He took big risks when he escorted Myra from camp. He must hev known that we'd all be down on him."

"Whar did you pick him up?" asked Flash Dan with much curiosity.

"He drifted inter camp 'bout two year ago, from the Stanislaus, he said."

"Did the girl take up with him soon?"

"Myra? She never took up with 'im at no time!" exclaimed Grizzly Dick. "They may say what they please, but I know that she never liked a hair on Stanislaus Steve's head. I'd hev follered 'em myself ef Windy Rube hadn't said he'd go alone. Ef he don't come back within three days from date, Flash Dan, Stanislaus will find on his trail the biggest pack ov hunters he ever tackled."

"Which means, I suppose," observed Flash Dan, smiling, "that all Bowie Bar will turn out to hunt him down?"

"Pretty much," said Grizzly Dick, and seeing that the Nabob was about to make no reply he went on, with another glance at Crested Hawk who had revived:

"I'll trot back ter camp, I guess. The Injun an' me ar' about squar'. It's choke for choke," and he essayed a chuckle. "I've had the last one, an' thet's what the red won't like."

Flash Dan did not attempt to detain the rough, and a moment later he had turned and was walking back toward the Bar with the dark coil of the lasso dangling again from his right hand.

"I didn't make no friend when I choked thet Injun, thet's pretty sartin," he said to himself. "Ef Flash Dan hadn't come up in the nick ov time I'd hev laid him out for Gabriel's trumpet. I'll do it yet ef he isn't satisfied with what he got to-night. Lost his silver handled bowie, eh? By Jove! I'd like ter get my fingers on it. It's a dandy prize an' no mistake."

Grizzly Dick did not glance back to see the Indian who was moving slowly up the trail hanging on the arm of the big sport of the silver lands.

Crested Hawk was not Flash Dan's equal in size, and his cheek rested on the Nabob's shoulder while his breaths were drawn in gasps so terrible had been the choking which had nearly terminated his career.

Flash Dan did not hurry the red-skin along, but let him proceed as suited his strength, and all the while he looked down on his copper-colored pard with pity and undying friendship in his big black eyes.

As for Grizzly Dick, he kept on into camp, nor stopped until he stood at the counter of the Smiling Corpse Saloon, and told the whisky genius who presided over the place to set out what he was pleased to term a "lightning straight."

The crowd which a short time before had half-filled the den had departed, and Grizzly Dick and the barkeeper were the only occupants of the place.

Nothing was said until Grizzly Dick had filled

his glass and thrown back his head to give the vile mixture an easy passage down his throat.

"Jehosaphat! whar'd ye get thet?" he suddenly exclaimed, setting his glass down on the counter with its contents untasted.

His eyes were riveted on the Indian's bowie still sticking in the shattered mirror.

"Whar'd ye get it, Pilgrim Pete, I say?"

"The red throwed it thar," was the answer.

"Thet silver-handled bowie?"

"Yes."

"An' walked off an' left it?"

"Thet's just what he did. He stuck it thar for security. He owes this bar sixteen dollars, thet coppery rattlesnake does, an' when thet knife left his hand a twenty dollar lookin'-glass went ter ruin."

Grizzly Dick looked at the knife while the bartender spoke and forgot both his thirst and the panacea that glittered at his hand.

"Hand it down hyar, Pete," he suddenly said.

"I can't. The Injun said it should stick thar till he pays his score."

"An' you think he'll pay it?" laughed Dick derisively.

"He said Flash Dan would furnish the coin."

"When?"

"He didn't name the day."

"I should reckon not. I heard ov that silver-handled bowie long afore I ever saw its owner. He war about ter play it off at the monte tables in Carson t'other night when Flash Dan interfered an' dragged him off. Oh, pull 'er out an' let me inspect it."

"Hang me, ef I touch it," said Pete the whisky-seller. "The durned Injun put it thar an' he kin plank down on this counter what he owes an' pull it out himself."

"It's worth more'n twice what his bill is."

"I don't keer if it's worth a cool thousand."

Grizzly Dick made no reply, but turned to his whisky, which he drank off at a single gulp, but all the while kept his eyes fixed on the bowie in the broken mirror.

"I'll take another thunderbolt, Peter," he said, setting the glass down, and a second time he drained the tumbler to the dregs.

Then throwing a piece of gold upon the counter, he suddenly turned and walked toward the door.

Under the influence of the burning fluid his eyes snapped like the orbs of an irritated tigress and the barkeeper followed him with a look tinged with uneasiness.

All at once Grizzly Dick stopped and then whirled toward the bar.

Pilgrim Pete almost uttered a cry of fear.

The next moment the rough was walking back, his blazing eyes glaring at the bowie over the bar.

"That Injun choked me, hang him!" he hissed. "I want his knife. By heavens! I'm goin' ter give it back ter him, but in his heart. I won't trouble ye ter take it down, Peter, my gentle rosebud; I'll remove it myself!"

The bartender knew the man with whom he had to deal, he knew, too, the effect of the fiery stuff he had just exchanged for gold.

Grizzly Dick was at the counter when he finished the last sentence, and the next moment he was upon it, reaching for the coveted prize.

Pilgrim Pete dared remonstrate no more, so he stepped back and let the desperado have his way.

Crested Hawk had hurled the bowie with all his might, and the point was driven deep into the heavy plank that formed the back of the saloon.

Dick's position was not a good one for work, but he braced himself as best he could and tugged at the bowie, sweating and swearing at the Indian's powers.

"Hyar it comes!" he suddenly ejaculated.

"Now I've got it, Peter!"

He gave a strong jerk toward him, the knife yielded, and the next instant the rough of Bowie Bar was describing a back somerset from the counter.

"Good! I hope you've broken yer neck!" grated Pilgrim Pete, leaning over the counter to see the desperado alight on the hard floor.

Grizzly Dick came down with all his force, but the succeeding second he sprung up with a yell that would have done a wildcat credit.

"Got the benefit of the bowie, did ye?" chuckled the bartender.

Grizzly Dick had actually fallen on the knife, and he now glared at it as it stuck in his left leg between knee and thigh.

A little higher, and the theft of the silver-handled bowie would have proved the costliest theft of the mountain desperado's life.

"Curse the blade! I'll put it where it'll do the most good!" he suddenly cried, and he drew the bowie from the pierced limb and shook the fresh blood from the polished steel. "Ef the Greaser should come, Peter, just whisper in his ear thet he kin git the silver-handled bowie ov vers truly, Grizzly Dick, late ov Double Star Mountain. The red lizard choked me! By Jupiter! I'll kill him!"

That was all; and while Pilgrim Pete looked he found himself deserted, for, with the prize in his hand, Grizzly Dick had stepped out into the moonlight.

The barkeeper proceeded to steady his nerves

with some of his own liquors, and, as he was not interrupted, he steadied them to such an extent that he fell against the counter, and very soon, with his head buried between his arms, he fell asleep.

His was a sleep too deep to be broken by the tread of the man who entered the den almost an hour later and walked straight toward the counter.

"Hyar! Wake up, Pete, an' git me a drink!" said the man, as his hand descended on the barkeeper's shoulder like a miniature trip-hammer.

The blow would almost have roused the dead. It broke Pilgrim Pete's slumbers, and he started up with a cry.

"God above! Stanislaus Steve!" he exclaimed.

"Thet's just who I am," was the retort, accompanied by a mad, defiant flash and a glance toward the open door by a pair of fierce eyes.

"Who ar' ye lookin' at? I'm no ghost! What! drunk on yer own p'izen, eh? Hyar! set out yer nerve-bracer. Quick! I'll watch the door while you produce the red ruin!"

"Watch—the-door!" Pete managed to articulate.

"Yes!" flashed Stanislaus Steve, lifting his hand and displaying a cocked revolver. "Ask no questions ov me now. I'm dyin' ov thirst, an' my throat's on fire. Whar's yer liquid p'izen?"

Pilgrim Pete was still drunk, but he managed to place bottle and glasses before his customer.

The liquor gurgled for a moment, then all was still.

"Now!" hissed Stanislaus, "I intend ter rest hyar five minutes, an' I propose ter kill the man who shows himself at the door within that time!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHO CAME.

STANISLAUS STEVE had actually come back to Bowie Bar.

It will be recollected that he and Mountain Myra had gone off at the same time, and that men said openly that they went away together.

We have seen Windy Rube depart with the avowed intention of hunting them down, but here was Stanislaus back in camp, and swearing to shoot dead the first man who presented himself at the open door of the Smiling Corpse Saloon.

The attitude of the runaway seemed to sober Pilgrim Pete, and he threw a glance of fear from Stanislaus to the door, wondering who would come first, yet hoping that his desperate customer would depart without shedding blood.

Stanislaus Steve rested his elbows on the edge of the counter and watched the door with the eyes of a hawk.

"Who do ye expect?" suddenly asked the barkeeper, unable to bridle his curiosity any longer.

"Thet's my business, Peter; but it doesn't matter much who comes first" was the answer.

"It's all the same ter this gold camp chick."

"Windy Rube found you, then?"

"Yes, he found me," and Stanislaus looked Pilgrim Pete madly in the eye. "Left Bowie Bar for thet purpose, didn't he?"

"Thet's what he said."

"I thought so. I'd give all the dust I ever expect ter own ter see him step up to thet door. It wouldn't be hands up, Peter, but it would be heels down! Hush! somebody's comin'."

The rough turned toward the door.

Who was at hand?

Half a minute later the stalwart figure of a man appeared in the lamplight, and the bartender threw a hasty glance at the desperado.

"Flash Dan from Nevada!" fell from his lips as the Nabob crossed the threshold of the den, and came boldly forward.

Stanislaus did not cover him with his revolver, but broke his resolution to shoot the first man that came.

Flash Dan reached the bar with his eyes fastened on the broken mirror, and with a look of disappointment on his face.

"Whar's the Hawk's bowie. I'm hyar ter redeem it," he said quietly, as his gaze fell to the man who watched him between counter and shelves.

Stanislaus Steve had stepped back a foot, and from his new position was sizing the Nevada sport, while he addressed himself to Pilgrim Pete.

"The bowie's disappeared," said the whisky-seller to Flash Dan.

"I see it has. Crested Hawk stuck it through yer mirror for security. Who removed it?"

There was a demand in the sport's tones. "I didn't give it up because I wanted ter. He took it against my will—got up on thet counter an' deliberately pulled it out, the dirty galoot. Wal, he got it in his leg afore he got through with the job. It's a pity it wasn't his heart!"

"Who is he? Tell me who took the knife away?"

"Grizzly Dick."

"Oho! that fool!" laughed Flash Dan. "I'm always a little too late ov late it seems. So the Hawk's bowie dropped inter Grizzly Dick's hands, eh?"

"Yes."

"Is he in camp?"

"I think he is; but he'll not give it up with out a tussle; judgin' from what he said just before he left, he means bloody business."

"What did he say?"

"He told me ter tell ther Injun ef he came just who had the bowie, an' then he said he intended ter kill Crested Hawk for chokin' him."

The eyes of Flash Dan twinkled maliciously.

"Some men ar' born fools, an' this fellow is one ov 'em," he said coolly. "Nobody wants ter fool with thet red pard ov mine. He's p'izen an' death without thet bowie, but with it—Jehu! he's forty thunderbolts rolled inter one! I will find Grizzly Dick in camp, you think?"

"Thet's my opinion."

"Then I'll hunt him up."

Flash Dan turned toward the door but the first step had not been taken when a hand dropped lightly on his shoulder, and he turned to Stanislaus Steve.

"Pardon me, Flash Dan," he said pleasantly.

"Won't you clink glasses with me ere you go?"

The invitation was so well spoken that it was almost irresistible.

"I've seen you frequently, but this is our first personal encounter, I believe. I've seen you at Virginia City, at Austin, an' at twenty other places. You may not know me."

"I do not, sir."

"I thought so," laughed Stanislaus.

"Hyar, Peter, set out yer best bottle an' a pair ov glasses. Flash Dan an' I will drink to our acquaintance."

The bottle and glasses were at once forthcoming, but Flash Dan did not glance toward them.

"Who are you?" he asked. "A thousand men know me thet I don't know from Sittin' Bull. What's yer name?"

"Stanislaus Steve."

Instantly Flash Dan recoiled a step, his eyes flashed up. The announcement thrilled him.

"Stanislaus Steve, eh?" he ejaculated. "By heavens! you're one ov the men I want ter see. What hev ye done with Mountain Myra? Tell me!"

It was Stanislaus's turn to be surprised.

"We'll drink first," he said after some silence.

"Nary drink!" said the Nabob, sternly pushing aside the glass Pilgrim Pete slid toward him.

"You'll answer me first. Whar's the girl—the one you took from Bowie Bar not long ago?"

"I don't know."

"What! don't know? I want no foolishness, Stanislaus."

"An' you'll yet none from me!" flashed the sport of Bowie Bar.

"What became ov Myra? She went off with you?"

"Yes."

"Wal?"

"She gave me the slip."

"In the mountains?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you hunt for her?"

"I did, but I couldn't find her."

Flash Dan was silent for a moment.

He did not seem to doubt one of Stanislaus Steve's answers.

"Do you want the particulars?" asked Stanislaus.

"No. If she gave you the slip thet's enough. But I want ter know suthin' else. It may seem impertinent, but I want ter know just the same."

"Go ahead."

"Did Myra go away with you entirely ov her own free will?"

A smile appeared at the corners of Steve's mouth before he replied.

"I don't press the question, remember thet, Stanislaus," continued Flash Dan.

"An' I'll be square with you," was the retort.

"I took the mountain daisy off."

"Against her will?"

"Somewhat thet way."

"An' got her lost?"

"Yes, if you look at it in a certain light. I didn't intend ter lose her. I thought she might be back at the Bar, an' thet's why I'm hyar."

"Windy Rube didn't find you two, then?"

"He found me, about two hours ago."

"So near Bowie Bar? Then he had given up the hunt?"

"I didn't ask him. I know thet I leaned from my saddle an' knocked him, figuratively speakin' inter the center ov next week."

"With what?"

"With this," and Stanislaus showed his right hand. "Oh, I know I've got all Bowie Bar ag'in me," he went on quickly; "but I'll hold my own. I'm expectin' Windy Rube an' his Blades hyar every minute, an' thet's why I remarked awhile ago thet I intended to kill the first man who came in. I warn't thinkin' about you, Flash Dan. I didn't even know you war near the diggin's. Hang me! ef I don't regret losin' the girl! I thought this 'd be the first place she'd break for. Mebbe she's hyar for all. I hev'n't inquired yet. Ar' you interested in her ter any extent?"

The sudden and pertinent interrogative startled the Nevada Sport.

"I am," he answered promptly. "I see no reason for hidin' from you the fact thet I came hyar principally ter see her."

"You know her, then?"

"Never saw her in my life."

"Jupiter! Thet's strange!" exclaimed Stanislaus. "Truth doesn't give fiction ther ghost ov a chance in this country. Wal, we'll sample Pilgrim Pete's mountain nectar before we go on."

Flash Dan poured out a quantity of liquor and eyed it thoughtfully while more gurgled from the bottle into Steve's glass.

"Hyar's ter luck an' oceans ov it!" cried Stanislaus as he struck Dan's glass with his own and threw it to his lips. "I'd give a thousand ef I hedn't left thet Californy pink among the mountains!"

"An' I'd add a thousand to it," said Flash Dan. "But don't let what's happened bother ye. I'll get thar yet, Stanislaus."

The man from Nevada spoke with a determination that commanded a look from Stanislaus Steve, but he did not speak.

He seemed to be wondering what Flash Dan meant by "getting there," and when he replaced his glass on the counter he said:

"By Jupiter! that girl may be a good deal to you. Ef you say so, I'll help you hunt her."

"Thanks, but I'm equal to the emergency," answered Flash Dan. "You lost her an' I'll pick her up. I'm satisfied thet she didn't come back ter Bowie Bar. What should bring her back? I'd like ter know. They say she never fancied the pards thet made it what it is."

"I guess thet's so," put in Pilgrim Pete. "She's a daisy, thet creature is, an' the only person in camp who thought anything ov the Tahoe Infant."

At the mention of the big boy from Tahoe Flash Dan started perceptibly, and his eyes suddenly lit up with resentment.

"I forgot the boy," he said to Stanislaus Steve. "When you ordered him ter go back ter Tahoe, you got him inter trouble."

"I?"

"Yes; I know all about it. Did you really consider thet big simple boy a rival?"

"By Jerusalem! he made me mad with what he said," said Stanislaus. "He's a nuisance anyhow, an' Tahoe's ther place—"

"Thar! thet's enough," interrupted the Nabob. "I'm not goin' ter quarrel unless I'm forced ter. You drove ther Infant from camp because you thought he war makin' love ter Mountain Myra. He found Windy Rube an' his pards on their way back from Carson, an' Windy shot him down like a dog."

"No!"

"Shot him, he did, the skunk!" grated Flash Dan. "I found the poor boy wanderin' crazy-like on the trail an' left 'im in Crested Hawk's keer while I came hyar, hopin' I'd find Windy. The boy isn't dead, but thet isn't Windy Rube's fault."

"Ov course not, for—"

Stanislaus was interrupted by a loud voice on the outside.

"I'll mash the ground with him!" cried this voice. "Give me a chance at him an' I'll drive him through inter China! Great rattlers! I kin whip a thousand Stanislaus Steves an' all at once. Whar is the camp bound anyhow?"

Flash Dan and Stanislaus seemed to be held spellbound by these words, and neither moved nor spoke till the end.

"I know thet shrieker," said Stanislaus with a quiet smile which was full of a desperado's fearlessness. "I didn't hit him quite hard enough. He's on the road to this shanty an' I'll administer another dose of fives thet'll hev the desired effect. I don't want his life, an' I won't give him a chance ter take mine."

It was evident from the loud voice on the outside that the boisterous speaker was moving toward the saloon, and when Stanislaus finished, he moved toward the door and planted his burly but handsome figure alongside of it.

There, with right fist clinched and eyes and ears on the alert, he waited for his enemy.

Nor did he have to wait long.

"No, sirree! I'll scrape Californy, but what I find him!" rung out the mad voice again.

"No man knocks me off my hoss an' lives ter boast ov it. I'm a face-masher, I am—a reg'lar mauler from Crushertown. Show me the galoot called Stanislaus—the thief who stole Mountain Myra from Bowie Bar! I'll chaw 'im up!"

The man was within three feet of the door of Pilgrim Pete's den.

Stanislaus Steve straightened, and raised his arm.

The next moment the form of Windy Rube was in the doorway, and then—

Crash! thud! and a human figure lay motionless in the moonlight!

What a terrible blow it was!

"I'll see you later. Good-by," cried Stanislaus Steve with a glance at Flash Dan and he leaped from the saloon and sprang over the fallen rough as half a dozen revolvers clicked.

But before one of them could cover him he was gone!

CHAPTER XV.

A GREAT MISTAKE.

If Stanislaus Steve had told the truth when he said that Mountain Myra had given him the slip among the everlasting hills of the Golden State, what had become of her?

It was the day after the somewhat startling events that go to make up the chapter just closed, that a beautiful young girl might have been seen toiling on foot up one of the elevated trails of the Sierra.

The sun was several hours high, and with his strong light was burnishing the mountain peaks, and chasing the shadows from crag to crag as he advanced majestically toward the zenith.

Bowie Bar and its desperate inhabitants were far away, but one might have ascended to the summit of a mountain near the girl and looked down upon the camp where so many of our scenes have been laid.

We scarcely need inform the reader that the girl climbing the trail at this hour was Myra.

She had given Stanislaus Steve the slip, had hidden from him for a number of hours, hoping, almost believing, that he had given up the hunt.

The young beauty of Bowie Bar was imprisoned in a wild scope of country that was almost entirely unknown to her.

"Stanislaus will go back to the Bar, therefore I cannot," she said, aloud to herself. "He will say that he never took me off, that I went with him, and the men who are his friends will not believe me—a girl. I have one friend there, but he would not stand long between me and the jeers of the toughs of Bowie. God above! I must turn my face toward the Nevada towns. I must leave the land of gold if I want peace, happiness, and enjoyment. Why didn't I leave before? Why did I wait for Stanislaus to carry me off, to lose me among these merciless hills? Oh, where is the Carson City trail? Father of mercy! direct my feet toward it!"

The girl plodded on, seen by the eagles that swept the clouds with their gigantic pinions, and fanned by the winds that at times fairly whistled down the narrow trail.

All at once she stopped and listened.

"What is that?" she suddenly exclaimed. "Is it possible that I hear the rumble of the Carson City stage? Have I been so near the main trail all this time? I will see what it means! If I am near the stage it shall bear me across the gold border never to return."

Summoning all her strength to her aid Mountain Myra ran on, and suddenly found herself on a wider trail and one which she recognized with an ejaculation of joy.

Just as she reached it she noticed a cloud of dust a short distance away, and then heard the coarse shout of a man and the sharp crack of a whip.

The big stage to Carson!

The sounds sent a thrill to the young girl's heart; she felt like bounding forward to meet the stage, but with difficulty kept her place.

On came the vehicle while Myra held her breath, and all at once it burst from the cloud of dust and appeared in full view.

What a gladsome sight it was to the fugitive's eyes!

She stepped aside and waited for the four-horse vehicle.

It was coming toward her at a lively gait, and would not keep her waiting long.

In a few moments the cumbersome stage was abreast of her, and with a shout to attract the driver's attention she sprang forward.

"Whoa! Jehu! a girl!" ejaculated the grizzly bearded fellow perched on top of the vehicle as he fell back, tightening the lines on the dust-covered team. "By my gizzard! thet daisy looks familiar. Seen her afore, sartain! Hold up thar, my beauty. I'm comin' down!"

The driver dropped his lines and came down over the side of the stage while he gave vent to the language just recorded, and he suddenly dropped on the ground at Myra's feet and his bronze fingers encircled her arm.

"Yes, yes, get right inside," he said before she could speak. "No charge for beauty on this stage line. You b'long ter Bowie Bar, don't yer? Of course you do, my Sierra sunflower. Hyar we ar'! git right inside an' make yerself comfortable. Got two passengers but they're gentlemen—Government officials ov some sort. Glad I kin haul ye. Must hev got lost somehow, eh? Hyar we ar', I say. Hyar's a new passenger, gents, a real mountain pink an' cre thet you don't pluck every day on this route. Jehu! she's a beauty. They call 'er Myra at the Bar! Ho! off we ar'!" and the door of the stage shut on the girl and the Jehu of the mountain stage clambered back to his perch.

All this seemed to pass like a dream to the girl who found herself thrust so suddenly into the vehicle.

She saw the two good-looking, full-bearded and well-dressed passengers, she heard their voices as they both invited her to a seat at the same time, but nothing more.

The next second her strength seemed to give way, the stage started forward with a jerk and then her senses swam, and she sunk unconscious on the floor!

The slight halt seemed to refresh the horses for they bounded away with new vigor at the driver's signal, and the vehicle was soon flying down the stage trail at good speed.

The man of the whip cracked the lash over the horses' heads, and swore and shouted after the most approved manner of stage driving.

Meanwhile, the two passengers were using their endeavors to restore Mountain Myra to consciousness.

The driver had dubbed them gentlemen and Government officials, and their appearance seemed to confirm the appellations.

More than three miles were traversed before the girl showed any signs of a return to consciousness.

She at last opened her eyes and gasped.

Her surroundings seemed to surprise her; she could not recollect what had occurred for some minutes after her recovery.

With words and looks she thanked the men for their attention, and then sunk back on the seat and relapsed into silence.

She had struck the trail in the nick of time, and she was going to Carson City, away from Bowie Bar at last, away from Stanislaus Steve, from Windy Rube and the desperadoes!

This thought brought a gleam of satisfaction to her eyes; it seemed to send new life through her veins.

From Bowie Bar at last!

She could not help thinking of her life there, of the terrible scenes she had witnessed, the days of quarrels, the nights of bloodshed.

She was leaving Modoc Kate behind, making her the sole representative of her sex among the men-tigers of the gold camp.

While Kate had never been her confidante, she had been her friend, and Mountain Myra thought now of many pleasant moments spent with the Trigger Queen, and how she watched the Tahoe Infant, and seemed to take a great interest in him.

All at once, as it were, her thoughts reverted to her present journey.

She was anxious to know when they would reach Carson City.

She was hungry; her wanderings through the mountains had sharpened her appetite to a ravenous degree.

She longed to see Carson; to her it was the first milestone on the road to safety and freedom.

When she looked at the two passengers they were admiring the rough scenery that surrounded them, and one who had evidently made the journey before, was describing the country to his companion.

Mountain Myra did not like to disturb them, but she could wait no longer; her curiosity got the better of her.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," she said leaning toward the two men, and touching one on the sleeve. "I am anxious to know when the stage will reach Carson City."

The following moment she found the passengers looking into her face with expressions of astonishment in their eyes.

"To Carson, miss?" exclaimed one. "We are going West. This stage will rumble into Bowie Bar before the hour's out."

Bowie Bar!

Mountain Myra started up, a wild cry pealed from her throat.

"My God! what a terrible mistake!" she exclaimed. "I thought all the while that this stage was bound for Carson City."

"You never inquired about it and we thought it made little difference to you," was the answer.

"It does, though. I cannot go to Bowie Bar! Heavens! I thought I had said farewell to the mountain den. Stop the stage! No! I will leave it as it flies!"

She tried to pass the two men with a pair of wild eyes fixed on the door in the rear of the vehicle.

"Pardon us, miss," said one of the passengers as his hand closed on her arm. "It will be worth your life to leave the stage as it runs. You must not do it! Remain in till we reach Bowie Bar, and then—"

"Never!" interrupted Myra. "What should take me thither? Better a life among the wolf-trails of the Sierra than existence where the wild pards of the gold camp reign! No, gentlemen! I get out here."

She jerked loose as she finished and had reached the door, when she was caught again and held firmly, but with much gentleness.

"You will go to the Bar, miss, and we will see that you are not subjected to any indignity," said her captor.

"You?" almost laughed the girl. "You men face Stanislaus Steve and Windy Rube? You don't know the roughs who rule at Bowie Bar. Let me alight, please!"

But Myra's pleadings had no effect, and seeing that they were determined to keep her in the vehicle, she settled back in the corner with a sigh and saw the stage lumber on.

Not another word passed between her and the two passengers during the remainder of the journey which occupied a very brief space of time.

Myra started when she found herself among the well-known cabins of the gold camp, and looked out eagerly for a familiar face.

The stage was not long in reaching the halting-place in the small square the camp boasted of, and Mountain Myra was eager to leave it.

"I wish this was Carson instead of Bowie Bar," she said with a glance at one of the pas-

sengers, as the foamy horses halted to the driver's vociferous "whoa!"

"No doubt of it," was the rejoinder. "You will not have to stay here long. Day after tomorrow the Carson City stage passes through this place."

Myra did not reply, but sprang to the door which one of the passengers was holding open for her and a moment later reached the ground.

She had scarcely touched it ere she heard a loud exclamation of astonishment, and a man landed at her side.

"In God's name! whar did you come from?" saluted her ears.

A thrill shot to the young girl's heart, and all color left her cheeks as she wheeled and found herself looking into the dark face of a stalwart man around whose glittering eyes were two black rings.

"I came from the mountains," she said, her black eyes flashing. "And I inform you boldly, Windy Rube, that my stay at Bowie Bar shall be very short."

"Jewhiz!" was the answer. "We'll see who runs this camp!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FLASH DAN DOOMED.

WINDY RUBE glared at Mountain Myra with a pair of evil eyes as she turned her back on him and deliberately walked off.

"Came back ov yer own accord, eh?" he said to himself. "Thet's better than havin' ter look for ye among ther mountains. I'll thank Whip-lash Mart for pickin' ye up. Mebbe you've come back ter find Stanislaus. I want ter see him, too. The blow he struck last night I want ter pay back with cold steel, an' I'll do it, too!"

By this time the girl had disappeared among the shanties, and Windy Rube walked away.

It was verging on toward midday when the stage fetched Mountain Myra back to Bowie Bar, and the camp was, of course, astir.

The girl went straight to the little cabin she had called home almost from the first hour of her residence in the gold camp, and satisfied her hunger from the cold contents of the larder it contained.

Back again at Bowie Bar!

She wondered what had transpired since her departure, with Stanislaus Steve holding the bridle-rein of her horse and showing by his eyes his mad love for her.

When she went away Windy Rube's optics were not dressed in mourning; he was then supposed to be in Carson City, and, knowing his character, Myra could very readily conclude that he had received his black eyes among the monte dens of Silverdom.

There was one person who could tell her all that had happened, and having recruited her strength by a meal and several hours of refreshing sleep, she bent her steps toward Modoc Kate's cabin.

From the moment that she left her own home till the one that saw her reach it, Rube's sharp eyes were fastened upon her, and a sinister smile crossed the watcher's face when he saw her enter the home of the Trigger Queen.

"You'll get precious little information thar!" exclaimed the watcher. "Just at this writin' it is not known exactly whar Modoc Kate is."

The speaker was Windy Rube, and he turned away and left Mountain Myra to search the cabin in vain for the person she wanted to find.

Five minutes later the boss bully of Bowie Bar, with four men at his back, entered one of the mines at the edge of the camp, and once in the dark corridor, stopped suddenly and said, "halt."

"I tell you," he said, "suthin's happened ter Solid Saul. I sent him, the other night, ter remove the Infant's body from the trail afore Modoc Kate got thar, an' he hasn't come back yet. He didn't go on ter Carson, for Solid Saul is no deserter. Ther Banded Blades hev sworn ter stand together to the end. Woe to the man who finished our pard, if he has been wiped out!"

"Mebbe the prisoner knows something about him," said one of the pards. "He came over the trail since Saul left camp."

"Thet's what we're goin' ter find out," answered Windy Rube. "Now, boys, remember thet nothin' must melt our hearts. The man we ar' about ter face war once our pard; remember thet we banished him from Nugget City, tied to a mountain tramp whose cause he took up when he hadn't known the tramp five days. He came ter Bowie Bar, an' he fell inter the trap we set. All his silver—an' they say he bez tons ov it—all his oaths an' his pledges, must not move you. We kill him, or be killed by his hand. He has found us after five years, an' he hates us just as bad now as when we lashed him to Lonely Jack an' started 'im to the Shasta mountains. Remember! no mercy for Flash Dan!"

The answer was enough to make Windy Rube's eyes flash triumphantly.

"Show us the man, an' we'll show you a corpse!" flashed the four Blades.

Windy Rube turned and led his pards down the dark corridor of the mine.

Deeper and deeper into the bowels of the mountain went the five men, their way revealed

by the torch that burned above their leader's head.

Had Flash Dan walked into the trap which had been set for him?

Between Windy Rube's knock-down by Stanislaus Steve and the hour of Mountain Myra's arrival in camp, a startling victory had been obtained.

It can be related in a few sentences, and this seems to be the proper place for it.

Flash Dan saw the blow dealt that sent Windy Rube reeling from the door of the Smiling Corpse Saloon.

Stanislaus Steve struck vengefully, and landed the leader of the Banded Blades some distance from the den and quite insensible.

Then, as we have seen, he leaped over the rough, and made his escape before one of Windy Rube's companions could successfully cover him.

The Nevada Nabob went toward the door himself with the intention of retiring quietly and rejoining the little party he had left in the cavern not far from camp; but his prominent figure was instantly seen and before he could lift a hand half a dozen revolvers had him covered.

It was the work of a second, and death glared at him from six steel barrels.

Flash Dan was a man of judgment and discretion.

He knew that the first aggressive or defensive move on his part would seal his doom, and when he looked at the desperadoes who stood erect over the unconscious ruffian, he instantly made up his mind what to do.

The next moment he was walking straight toward the leveled revolvers with his hands above his head in token of submission, and while the eyes of the roughs gleamed with victory.

Flash Dan was a prisoner, and in the hands of men who had once been his pards, but men who had banished him from a camp in the Shasta country.

They hated him because they feared him; they knew that he had not forgotten that unjust banishment, and that they would not be safe while he had power to pay them back for it.

Flash Dan was marched from the scene of his capture, and closely guarded with revolvers to the innermost recesses of a mine whose intricate corridors were totally unknown to him.

It was to be his prison, perhaps his tomb, for the looks of the Banded Blades told him that from them he could expect no mercy.

It was then toward the chamber whither Flash Dan had been conducted after his capture, that Windy Rube led his pards after Mountain Myra's unexpected return to Bowie Bar.

Let us go back to the rough gang.

The torch burned and flickered over their heads as they advanced down the rough stairways cut in the hard ground by the miner's pick.

More than once they swung themselves over yawning chasms by the aid of a dangling rope, and then descended again and again as if the underground trail led across the mountain border.

If they could have looked ahead and penetrated the darkness, they might have seen a man walking back and forth in a chamber dark as the precincts of a dungeon.

He was tall and magnificently built, with the clear, flashing eyes of the eagle and the lofty tread of one of nature's kings.

The rough marks of the pick were on the walls that surrounded him, and higher than he could reach, and without a single outlet, were those very walls of stone.

The Banded Blades reached the edge of the wall, and the man below caught the flash of the torch, and halted.

He did not speak, but stood in the center of the chamber and watched the light.

Suddenly it seemed to descend toward him, and the longer he watched it the more he became convinced that such was the fact.

At length he saw the rope from which the light was suspended, and when it stopped it was hanging in midair, lighting up the interior of the place and showing him the faces of six men above him.

"How do you like your quarters, Nevada?" said a voice which Flash Dan, the prisoner, seemed to recognize, for his eyes blazed madly. "This isn't yer Nevada palace, by any means, eh, Flash Daniel?"

Not a sound came up from the depths of the prison in response to these words, and the men who looked down saw a man looking sternly at them, with his arms folded calmly on his breast.

"We hev decided thet you hev'n't forgotten the banishment from Nugget City," continued Windy Rube, eying the man who, under the circumstances, could face them with the coolness displayed by the Nevada Nabob.

"An' you've decided right!" suddenly cried Flash Dan. "I don't remember it so much for myself as I do for the man you lied against and then sent to his death. I remember it for Lonely Jack's sake."

"Thet's durned clever in ye," laughed Windy Rube. "We invited ye to Bowie Bar. You came an' put yer foot in it, eh, Flash Dan?"

No answer.

"Ef you think we intend to give you liberty, you're the biggest fool in Californy," Windy Rube went on. "The pit thet hes been yer prison shall be yer tomb. How does that strike you, Nevada?"

"I'm no coward, if I did let you lash me to Lonely Jack," was the reply. "Carry out yer plans, but know that I am not friendless."

"Thet means yer red pard, Flash Dan?"

The eyes of the Nabob glistened.

"We're goin' ter make a clean sweep while we're at it. Of two rattlesnakes we're not goin' ter kill one an' let the other live. Not much! Them ain't Californy tactics. We'll set a trap for thet Injun ov yers an' catch him easily. Grizzly Dick hes sworn ter pin him to a board with thet silver-handled bowie ov his! Stand up like a man, Flash Dan, an' take yer medicine."

The ruffian ceased in a way that told the silver sport that the crisis had come.

As he gazed upward he saw six arms lowered toward him, and at the end of each was a cocked revolver.

"This is Bowie Bar, not Nugget City. Thar we banished; hyar we kill!" grated Windy Rube behind his six-shooter. "Look inter the cameras ov death an' photograph yer phiz on the globes ov lead! You didn't give Solid Saul any time—"

"Is Solid Saul dead?" interrupted Flash Dan.

"You know it. No lies on the brink ov eternity. You wiped thet Blade out."

"I never touched him. The man who says I slew Solid Saul lies!"

"Mebbe you didn't, then; but no difference," said Windy Rube. "We'll find the man who did, an' avenge our pard's blood. Now, look us in the face, Nevada. This old mine never gives up its prisoners, an' Nevada loses her Nabob to-day! Ready, boys! When I count three open yer death batteries on Flash Dan!"

The Banded Blades glanced down their weapons.

The Nabob did not quail!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BULL IN A CHINA SHOP.

FLASH DAN had come back to Bowie Bar just in time to get into trouble.

The silver-handled bowie left at Pilgrim Pete's place by Crested Hawk was the cause of his return, and he had fallen into the hands of the Banded Blades instead of walking off with the knife as he had expected.

He was not aware of the fact that the stage had fetched Mountain Myra back to the gold camp, but having heard Stanislaus Steve's story, he believed that she was still lost somewhere among the mountains.

At the moment of his peril when he saw the doomed prisoner of the old mine, Myra was having an interview to which we will revert.

The girl had found Modoc Kate's cabin without a tenant, and weary and disappointed had gone back again to her own.

Scarcely had she closed the door behind her when a quick rap startled her and she went forward to see who knocked.

The following moment an exclamation of surprise parted her lips and she was gazing into the bloodless face of the Tahoe Infant.

The boy had but lately reached the camp as his looks and manner indicated.

His clothes were dusty, he wore no hat, and he was almost out of breath.

"In heaven's name! where did you come from?" cried Myra as she clutched the boy's sleeve and dragged him into the cabin.

"I run off, ho, ho!" laughed the big boy showing his teeth and sparkling eyes. "Heard you went off with Stanislaus, but it was all a lie wasn't it, Myra? You'll never run off with such a gopher, he, he! I've been shot; see here." And the Infant put his hand to a bloody handkerchief that bandaged his head.

The girl started toward him with a strange cry.

"Who shot you?" she asked.

"Windy Rube."

"I know him for the choicest ruffian of the gold hills, but I never thought he would fire at you, Tahoe."

"He did, though," said the boy, his eyes displaying some fierceness. "One of these days, mebbe, he'll make the Tahoe Infant mad, ha, ha! Then let Windy Rube look out. They say I won't hurt anybody, Myra. What are my teeth for if I cannot bite?" and the boy leaned back and laughed again.

The beauty of Bowie Bar looked with eyes beaming with sympathy upon the simple-minded youth who had told her a hundred times that he loved her; time and again she had shared his simple triumphs and wept over his imagined sorrows, and now her eyes flashed indignantly over Windy Rube's cruelty.

She could not see how any one could lift a hand against the Tahoe Infant.

"So you ran off?" she said. "From whom?"

"From Modoc Kate an' her friends," was the answer. "Flash Dan an' his Injun pard find me in the mountain an' put me in a cave. There Crested Hawk watched me awhile till I went to sleep when he sneak off, ho, ho! Presently I open my eyes an' there stand Modoc Kate, Flash

Dan an' a boy who calls himself Nugget Ned. By an' by I run off from Kate an' the boy."

"And what made you come back here—to the home of Stanislaus and Windy Rube?"

"You," cried the boy with a smile. "I think mebbe I find you here. Stanislaus take you off, I hear, but I thought you'd give him the slip somewhar an' git back ter Bowie Bar. Ho, ho! I thought right, didn't I, Myra? You come back!"

"True, but not because I wanted to. The stage that picked me up carried me in the wrong direction. I wanted to go to Carson; it brought me to Bowie Bar. But now I'm glad that I am here," she quickly continued, looking into the boy's pleased eyes. "I'm glad that you escaped the cruel intentions of Stanislaus and Windy Rube. One banished you, the other attempted your life."

The Tahoe Infant came up to the girl, and gently touching her arm with one of his fingers, gazed up into her face.

"They'll try it again," he said solemnly.

"They don't like me because I love you, Myra."

Mountain Myra flushed, but quickly said:

"Not while I am here shall they harm you! We are friends, Tahoe, and the ruffian that touches you touches me."

The girl spoke with spirit and determination, and the youth took hope from voice and look.

"I almost wish you hadn't come back just at this juncture," the girl went on. "Windy Rube was knocked down last night by Stanislaus, who was caught at Pilgrim Pete's resort. He is in a terrible passion, and a glimpse of you will inflame him still further. Did anybody see you come into camp?"

"I saw nobody, Myra. Bowie Bar looked empty when I got here."

"Good! You must stay here in this shanty till we see how things go. Where is Flash Dan's Indian pard? The Banded Blades took the Nevada Nabob prisoner last night."

"Flash Dan?" cried the Infant, astonished.

"Yes."

"How did they hold him? He has the strength of a lion."

"I know that; but they covered him with five of the deadliest revolvers in California."

"Where is he?"

"They took him off, whither I do not know; but I think I could find him."

The boy was silent for a moment.

"That makes Crested Hawk mad, I'll bet," he said.

"Where is the Indian?"

"I left him in the cave. Grizzly Dick lassoed him, but Flash Dan got to him just in time."

"So Grizzly Dick is using his lasso?" exclaimed the girl. "Bowie Bar is waking up. Woe to Dick if the Indian gets a chance at him."

"Yes. All the time Crested Hawk growls about Dick an' his rope!" laughed the Infant.

"Mebbe he'll come to Bowie."

"Not alone, I think."

"Modoc Kate an' Nugget Ned may come with him."

"When they have missed you. They will take you away, Tahoe."

"I will not go!" cried the boy, firmly. "I will not go away from Mountain Myra. When Stanislaus says 'go' again, I will not move."

"Never fear," spoke the girl reassuringly.

"He will not banish you any more. The blow he dealt Windy Rube last night made an outlaw out of him. I doubt whether he will ever show himself again at the Bar."

"Good for thet!" the big boy laughed, showing his delight by his eyes. "Mebbe Windy Rube go an' hunt Stanislaus an' neither of them come back! Won't thet be a charmer, Myra?"

The girl could not but be amused at the boy's happiness over the prospects he had mapped out for himself.

With Stanislaus and Windy Rube out of his way, his happiness would be complete, and he would ask nothing more than to be near the beauty of Bowie Bar.

He submitted willingly to the imprisonment of Myra's cabin, for he realized at once that it would not do for him to be found in camp by Windy Rube who had once attempted his life in a most brutal manner.

The girl stepped to the door and looked out.

"Heaven! Bowie Bar has a red-skinned visitor!" she exclaimed.

"Who, Myra?" asked the Infant, springing to her side, but she quickly pushed him back.

"You must obey me," she said in tones of command. "For the present, you must be the captive of my cabin. Yes, a visitor has come to the Bar, and there's war in his looks."

All this time Mountain Myra's gaze was fastened on a person who stood between two cabins but a short distance from her own abode.

He was tall and straight like an Indian arrow, and his skin was dark, his scalp-locks long.

The beauty of the gold camp had seen Indians before, but never one so kingly, nor so majestic as he who stood in the broad glare of day between the cabins.

His eye took in his surroundings with an eagle's sweep, and from his mien Myra had a right to conclude that he was there for war.

"Let me see him—just one peep," pleaded the Tahoe Infant pushing forward.

"Only one, then. Look!"

The boy gazed for a moment at the red-skin and then exclaimed:

"It is Crested Hawk! He is on the hunt of Flash Dan."

Mountain Myra made no reply.

"Ho, ho! he sees us!" continued the Infant.

"He comes this way; he—"

The girl pushed the boy back and broke his sentence, then closed the door, and stood almost breathless at the threshold.

Was it true that Flash Dan's red pard had espied them?

Myra did not look out to see whether he was advancing toward the shanty, but stood motionless by the door.

Five minutes passed away, and not a sound was heard to break the silence.

"He didn't see us, after all," whispered the Tahoe Infant. "The red pard has gone away."

Myra opened the door slowly and without noise.

"Hush!" she said putting back her hand to the boy who was slipping forward full of curiosity. "By no means has the red-skin departed."

It was true.

Standing scarcely twenty feet from the little shanty but with his back turned to the door was the symmetrical figure of the Klamath brave.

He had evidently listened at the door for awhile, and then turned away disappointed.

Myra stood there and watched him breathlessly.

She wanted to tell him that Flash Dan had fallen into the clutches of Windy Rube and his pards, yet she dared not.

She did not know what effect the information would have on her own fortunes, or on those of the boy behind her.

Her own judgment told her that the Indian had not come to the Bar on a peace mission.

All at once she saw him start off.

"Crested Hawk will not leave the eagle's nest with empty hands!" she heard him grate in mad tones, and then she watched him with burning interest.

Not far down the deserted street stood the famous Smiling Corpse Saloon, and Myra saw the Klamath direct his steps toward it.

Was he going after his silver-handled bowie?

She followed him with her gaze until he entered the place, and then she listened.

If she could have kept at the Klamath's heels she would have seen him glance madly at the broken mirror over the bar as he sprung into the saloon.

A few hours before he had left his bowie sticking in it, security for the payment of sixteen dollars' worth of drinks.

Now what did he see?

A broken mirror, but no knife.

It was a dull time of day for Pilgrim Pete's business, for when the flashing-eyed Indian entered the den, the whisky-dealer did not have a single customer.

He was leaning on his counter, half asleep and by no means a handsome tableau.

As noiselessly as the panther bounds through the forest, the red-skin in moccasins leaped across the saloon.

Pilgrim Pete heard him not, was not aware of his presence, until a hand swooped, eagle-like, upon his head, and he was jerked upright, to be confronted by an apparition that whitened his face.

"Jerusalem!" he gasped. "Whar on earth did you spring from, Injun?"

"Whar's bowie?" cried the red, throwing a look at the looking-glass over the bar. "Crested Hawk said it must stick thar till he come to pay! Whar is it? Did the fire-water fool sell it to his pale pards? Speak, white cheek!" And leaning over the counter, he shook Pilgrim Pete till his teeth chattered.

"Give a feller a chance, won't yer?" he said.

"Afore heaven! I didn't move yer knife."

"Whar is it, then?"

"Grizzly Dick came hyar an' waltzed over the counter an' carried it off."

"Dick, eh?"

The Indian's eyes seemed a pair of blazing coals.

He hadn't forgotten the ruffian and his choking lasso.

"I swear it, Injun! Dick came hyar an' waltzed off with yer bowie."

"Why didn't Whisky Pete stop him?"

"Stop Grizzly Dick?" exclaimed Pete. "You musn't know thet individual, or you'd not say thet. Stop Grizzly with a bowie like thet in his hand? Not much, my red angel."

The infuriated Klamath glanced once more at the broken mirror, then cleared the counter at a single leap, and caught the whisky-vender by the throat.

"The fire-water fool no try to stop the thief who took Crested Hawk's bowie!" he hissed, as he forced the terrified man back among his bottles. "The Klamath will make him wish he had stood between Dick an' the knife!"

"For mercy's sake, don't choke me!" whined Pete. "I—couldn't—stop—that—devil!"

The Indian didn't seem to hear.

The next instant he jammed the liquor-dealer's head among the bottles and shook it there till they rattled down around it.

His madness increased with the destruction he made, and he shook the dealer among his wares until the shelves gave way, and the whole bar fell with tremendous force and noise to the floor.

Pete by this time had been choked into unconsciousness, and all at once the Indian threw him among his broken bottles and sprung over the counter.

Then, with a final and satisfactory look at the ruin he had wrought, he coolly walked from the den.

CHAPTER XIX.

INTO THE MOUNTAIN.

"I've heard ov cyclones, but that one skunks 'em all!" said the dilapidated whisky-soaked and bleeding individual who rose from behind the counter a few minutes after the Indian's departure.

Then he contemplated in silence, but with vengeful eyes, the ruin left behind.

Shelves down, bottles broken, glasses crushed into fragments!

It was a ruinous spectacle.

"Not a clean squar' drink 'mong it all," hissed Pilgrim Pete. "Confound that red wildcat. I'll have his best blood for his infernal work! He wouldn't go off satisfied when I told him that Grizzly Dick took his bowie, but he had ter turn himself inter a cyclone an' make me a pauper. I'm off on an Injun hunt right away, an' I don't propose ter stop till I kin soak his scalp in the whisky he poured out! I'm a lamb behind the counter, but on the war-path I'm a rustler. Look out, Mr. Red-skin, an' keep yer distance, ef ye want a hull hide. Pilgrim Pete ov Bowie Bar is on the war-trail!"

The bartender fished out from beneath the counter a weapon which was a rarity at the Bar—a double-barreled shotgun, and without more ado started toward the door on the lookout for the Indian.

"I intend ter drop the red cub on sight!" he cried. "No parley for this chick. When I handle the cards the game gits lively. Oh, I'm a hustler, ef I ain't a chromo."

He strode down the main thoroughfare of the gold camp like a maddened lion, carrying the formidable shotgun cocked before him, and with eyes on the alert for the red cyclone that had lately visited his establishment.

His appearance was ludicrous as well as terrifying, and if there had been many spectators, he would have created a sensation.

"Hello, thar, beauty-spot!" suddenly called out a voice at the sound of which Pilgrim Pete stopped short and raised his gun.

"What's put you on the war-path?" continued the same voice. "You can't run a muck in this camp without disastrous results."

"Can't eh? By Jupiter! I've got a notion ter begin on you. You're the cause ov it all."

"Me?" said the big fellow, who came toward the enraged whisky-dealer despite the menace of the gun. "What have I done?"

"Enough! You took away the bowie the Injun left stickin' over my bar!"

"Wal?"

"He came arter it awhile ago an' not findin' it, he turned himself inter a cyclone an' went through my trap."

"That Injun in camp?"

"I look like he's been somwhar in this neighborhood, don't I?" said Pete, surveying himself for a moment. "I look like a man what's been run through a distillery, I do. An' it all happened because you took that bowie away, Grizzly Dick."

Grizzly Dick stood before Pilgrim Pete, surprised for a moment.

"Well, you don't resemble nor smell like a mountain shrub," he said at last. "I'll admit that."

"Ner feel like a cricket, either," flashed Pete. "Hang me! ef I hev'n't got a notion ter lift yer skull. The knife did it all. Whar is it?"

"In my possession, ov course," was the answer. "The Injun gets it by-an'-by."

"Not till I've laid him out for a trip ter Injun paradise with the contents of this gun."

"We'll see about that, Peter. Ef you beat me to the Klamath, all right; ef I beat you—"

"I'll treat!" interrupted the barkeeper. "Good-by, Grizzly. I'm off after that red rustler. But hold on. Somebody's come back to Bowie Bar."

Grizzly Dick's eyes dilated.

"Who?"

"Guess."

"I can't."

"Mountain Myra an' the Tahoe Infant."

"No!"

"Fact. Didn't I see 'em both arrive, from the door ov my place? Windy Rube knows that the girl's back; but he hasn't seen the big boy what he dropped on the main trail. He'd better look out."

"Because the Infant has struck camp?"

"Yes."

Grizzly Dick burst into a laugh.

"Why the Infant wouldn't hurt a fly, Peter!" he cried. "He's no good fightin' blood in his veins. Thet youngster, big an' blubberly, seek revenge? Go away. You make me tired."

And Grizzly Dick waved the bartender away as he started off by himself.

Pilgrim Pete glanced over his shoulder and watched him awhile.

"Don't fool yerself about thet boy," he murmured. "A shot like Windy Rube's would r'ile any one. All right, Grizzly. If you find the red afore I do, drive the silver-handled bowie to his heart. If you don't, you never will!"

At that very moment in the outskirts of the gold camp stood the person for whom Pilgrim Pete was so eagerly seeking.

Crested Hawk's eyes flashed no longer.

He seemed to have gotten over his madness, for he was thoughtful and serene, if not puzzled a little over a problem of some kind.

He stood but a short distance from a hole in the mountain-side—a wide, gaping orifice, dark as midnight.

A hard path led to it and thence into the mountain.

Crested Hawk had seen mines before, and he knew that the hole was an entrance to one.

More than once his gaze wandered to it, but he made no attempt to explore its depths.

Three bounds could have carried him to it at any time.

All at once he started and looked at the opening.

"Who in thar?" he said to himself, and the next minute he stood at the mouth of the mine with his body bent forward and his senses all on the alert.

The only weapon that he held in his hand was a short-handled hatchet of iron and not at all sharp.

The famous bowie-knife had slipped out of his possession.

His attitude at the dark opening told that a suspicious sound had come from it to his quick ears.

His eyes glittered again.

It was broad day, and the sun that stood high in the heavens beat down upon the naked back of the red-skin.

Not a muscle moved while he listened for a repetition of the sound that had called him to the mouth of the mine.

At last his right hand stirred as he drew it back with the hatchet clutched tightly in it.

Panther-like, he had caught another sound, this time from a point so near that he seemed to be preparing for defense.

Not once had he looked behind him, nor glanced over his shoulder for a glimpse of a sneaking enemy.

"By Jehosaphat! we run this mountain ranch!" suddenly exclaimed a gruff voice amid the darkness of the mine. "The Banded Blades ov Bowie Bar ar' reg'lar rustlers ov death! We'll make Pilgrim Pete set 'em up when we git thar. We'll drink the trapshun dry!"

The last sentence was followed by a laugh in concert by several men.

"Bet yer teeth, Windy; we'll make Pete gurgel out his straight lightnin'!" was the response at the end of the laugh. "Carson City and its monte-dealers kin look till doomsday for Flash Dan. He died game, didn't he?"

"Somewhat," was the response. "Now for the Injun an' Stanislaus. Arter thet, we'll rest."

The Indian at the mouth of the mine heard all this.

The speakers, still unseen, were approaching all the time, but their voices preceded them some distance.

Was Crested Hawk going to face them all with the stump of a hatchet that he carried in his hand?

At last he glided back and took up his station about twenty yards from the mine, and where a big bowlder would screen him from observation.

Not for a moment, not even during his change of base, did he take his gaze from the opening that led into the mountain.

He was anxious to see who was about to issue forth, though his look seemed to say that he almost knew.

Crested Hawk did not have to wait long behind the rock, for presently a human figure appeared at the mouth of the mine.

"Ah! the boss chief!" was all that parted his lips.

Yes, it was Windy Rube, and at his back walked four men, his equals in physical strength and mountain ruffianism.

At one time the Indian seemed about to precipitate himself upon the quintette, but he restrained himself by a supreme effort, but watched them with a hawk's eye and counted them as they tramped away.

"Crested Hawk will see 'em all by 'm by," he ejaculated. "They fix Flash Dan mebbe, but the Klamath lives to strike for his white brother! The trail that he will make in the gold lands will be red when the sun rises again!"

He did not move again till Windy Rube and his pards had marched out of sight behind the cabins, then he walked toward the gaping mouth of the mine and entered.

"The Indian will find Flash Dan first," was all he said before disappearing.

Just three minutes later another human figure came gliding toward the mine, a man without a

hat, but with fierce eyes and cut face, and with a shotgun in his hands.

Pilgrim Pete!

"I've run the durned red inter a trap, hev'n't I?" he cried triumphantly looking into the dark mine from whose depths no sounds came to indicate the Klamath's whereabouts. "Don't I know every foot ov thet Ophir Lode? Warn't I the original discoverer, an' at one time sole owner, eh? I couldn't hev tracked thet Greaser inter a better place. He hasn't a single weapon, an' I'm a walkin' battery. We'll see whether he kin come ter town an' make a flourishin' citizen a pauper just because Grizzly Dick carried off his bowie. Not much, reddy! You don't know the Ophir mine an' I do. Thar's whar I've got the call on yel!"

Pilgrim Pete stepped into the opening as he finished his last exultation.

"When I come out I'll leave a bad-lookin' Injun behind!" he said.

He was taking risks that he never thought of.

He had followed into Egyptian gloom one of the most fearless and vindictive red-men that ever trod a mountain trail.

CHAPTER XX.

RUFFIANISM RAMPANT.

"GREAT Caesar! what has happened hyar? Looks as if a cyclone's passed through this trap. Whar's the whisky cherub thet presides over it? Pete!"

There was no reply, and Windy Rube and the desperate fellows who had marched at his heels from the Ophir mine to Pilgrim Pete's den, continued to gaze with wonder-filled eyes at the ruin Crested Hawk had wrought.

It was a sight for which they had not prepared themselves.

They had come to the place to quench their thirst, but not a bottle was to be seen; even the shelves had disappeared.

"Looks kinder smashed-up like," said a voice at the door; and the Banded Blades turned to greet Grizzly Dick, who, like them, was surveying the scene of destruction. "Thet red-skin must be a hull cyclone in himself."

"What Injun?" cried Windy Rube, springing toward the speaker. "You don't mean ter tell us, Grizzly, thet Flash Dan's pard has been hyar?"

"Sartainly."

"When did he leave?"

"Arter he had cleaned the trap out an' made a chromo ov terror out o' Pilgrim Pete. The beauty's on the war-path somwhar at this minute, with two black eyes an' his shotgun."

"An' the red?"

"I don't know whar he is, but I'd like ter. It all happened, Pilgrim says, because I took the knife from the lookin'-glass. Sorry on your account, Windy, thet's nothin' ter drink." And Grizzly Dick leaned against the door-frame and looked at the thirsty men and the dilapidated whisky-shop.

Such a complete clean-out had never been known before in the gold camp, and it was hard to believe that one man had done it all.

"We'll get even with the Injun yet!" suddenly exclaimed Windy Rube.

"Ef Pilgrim Pete doesn't empty the contents ov his shotgun inter his anatomy," smiled Dick.

"He'll not do that. We've settled with Flash Dan."

"When did that happen?"

"A little while ago."

"In the mine?"

"Down in the depths of Ophir. We had ter, Grizzly. He wanted us—you know for what. Some men never forget a little thing like a banishment, an' he war one ov thet kind."

"Did you lasso him?" asked Grizzly Dick.

"No; we did it with the best revolvers in Californy," said Rube heartlessly, and with a laugh of triumph. "It war a good deal like shootin' at a rat in a bar'l, I admit, Grizzly, but it won't do ter give a man like the Nabob half a show."

"You ar' sure you finished him?"

"Great Jehu! why shouldn't we be?" cried Windy Rube. "We wouldn't be hyar if we hadn't done the work up brown."

"Then you've got only the Injun ter bother with."

Windy Rube burst into a laugh.

"What's one red-skin ag'in' Bowie Bar?" he exclaimed.

"Not much, ov course, but you'll hev ter beat me ter him if you expect ter settle with him first. I owe him one. The red devil choked me, you know, an' I've got his own bowie for his lude. But ef you don't make surer work ov him than you did ov the Tahoe Infant, thet Injun will live ter clean out more traps like this."

Grizzly Dick narrowly watched Windy Rube's countenance while he uttered the last sentence which seemed to be a startling revelation for it drew a strange cry from the big bully's throat.

"What's that?" he cried. "Didn't I finish the Infant on the Carson Trail?"

"Not as anybody knows of," smiled Dick.

"He's as lively as ever, and evidently wants revenge."

"Whar is he? Show me the big baby of Ta-

hoe, an' by Jupiter! we'll show him the noose ov a lasso! Show him up, Grizzly!"

"Wal, he's in camp," answered Grizzly, as if he took delight in urging the Banded Blades on to cruelty.

"Thet can't be!"

"He is, though. How he got hyar I don't know: but hyar he is."

"Whar is he?"

"With the best friend he's always had at Bowie Bar."

"Mountain Myra?"

"Of course."

"Then, by heavens! I'll seporate 'em!" roared Windy Rube as his face darkened with passion. "Come, pards ov Bowie, an' see me noose the boy Jonah ov this camp. He's alienated ther affections ov thet girl from the best man at the Bar, an' I'm not goin' ter stand it another hour. Curse his picture! He should hev been kicked out o' camp the first day he struck it, but, like a fool, I listened ter them two women—Modoc Kate an' Myra. Now, I'll see who's in authority hyar. Come with me, an' see a reg'lar picnic."

The ruffian strode toward the door with fury flashing up in his eyes, and when he stepped outside he had the crowd at his heels, Grizzly Dick among the number.

"What did you tell him for?" said Faro Phil at Grizzly's side. "I don't want the baby killed; but heavens! if Windy encounters him, salt-peter won't save him."

"I didn't think it would rile him this way," was the answer.

"Wal, it war sure to. He hates the Infant because he thinks Myra loves him, an' he's got his eyes on her."

"Windy Rube love Mountain Myra?" ejaculated Grizzly Dick.

"Yes; kind ov a hawk and dove affair, eh, Grizzly?" said Faro Phil, showing his teeth in a grin.

"Stanislaus loves her, too."

"It looks that way. If he dares ter come back ter Bowie Bar, he'll be shot on sight. Love makes some terrible enemies in these mountains. No; you shouldn't hev told Windy that the Infant war in camp, but you didn't think ahead, did you, Grizzly?"

"I didn't think," was the reply, yet Grizzly Dick's eyes did not say that he was sorry.

Windy Rube, who strode at the head of his bronze pards, seemed to know where to find the Tahoe Infant since he had made his way back to the Bar.

He was followed closely and eagerly watched by the stalwart fellows who tramped at his heels, eager to witness the outcome of the episode.

"Thar's his cabin, but he isn't in it," said Windy Rube, with a glance at a certain shanty on his left. "I know whar ter run across the baby arter the arrival ov the passenger brought in by the stage."

He bent his steps toward Mountain Myra's cabin, and the pards exchanged significant glances while he approached it.

The sun had passed the zenith, and was fast approaching the rugged horizon of the west.

Already the miner cabins were casting lengthy shadows on the ground, and from the mountains came a stiff, cool breeze that heralded the approach of night.

"Hyar we ar', at ther baby's cradle," laughed Windy Rube as he halted before one of the shanties, and threw a glance of triumph over his shoulders at his companions. "Thar's ter be no kickin' ag'in' my commands. Remember thet I speak as captain ov the Banded Blades ov Bowie Bar!"

There was no reply, other than glances that seemed to satisfy the rough, and another stride carried him to the very threshold of the shanty.

"Now for it," he said, lifting his fist.

The next moment the door was opened before he could deliver the intended rap, and the figure of Mountain Myra appeared to the gaze of all.

"Hello! girl!" cried Windy Rube. "We'd like ter interview the Tahoe Infant. Please ter fetch him to the door, will yer?"

The fair young girl did not move an inch, but her look suddenly changed from one of calmness to that of indignation.

"Don't get so tigerish all at once," continued Rube, with an insulting laugh. "The babe ar' hyar an' we know it. Trot him out, my mountain lily!"

"For you to succeed where you failed before?" cried the girl, looking the camp bully squarely in the eyes.

"Who said so?"

"Your eyes. No; the boy does not fall into your clutches while I am here!"

"By Jovel you're gettin' durned independent ov late!" hissed Rube. "The girl what ran off with a camp whelp like Stanislaus ought ter exhibit a little sense arter the romance is ended. Won't make the baby show up, eh?"

"I have told you," was the firm rejoinder. "The boy is not your match, and you know it."

"Ov course we do. We want ter see 'im—"

"All right," said Myra. "We heard a while ago that he was in camp, an' I'm a-bid to see the lad ov my own."

"I shall not trust him."

into the inhuman hands of the Banded Blades. You tried to kill him once."

"An' the next time mebbe he'll not get off so easy!" grated Windy Rube. "See hyar! You say you won't exhibit the babe for our inspection?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll see him in spite ov you."

Quick as a flash the hand of Windy Rube darted at the girl's arm, and closed on it like the talons of a hawk.

She started back, uttering a cry of rage and pain, but the ruffian did not release her.

"Won't show him, eh?" he cried. "You forget, girl, that this is Bowie Bar. We're just fresh from one wipin'-out, an' in trim for another. This proves it all. You think more ov this big baby than you do ov Stanislaus, an' yet you went off with him. Look me in the eye. I'm Windy Rube, girl, the worst card in the deck, the biggest wolf in the pack. You've lived five years at Bowie Bar. Has it taken all this time ter find me out?"

"No," said Myra, returning look for look as he held her in his vise-like grip. "I've known you all along. Not once have you deceived me, Windy Rube."

He laughed, and began to drag the girl toward him.

"I'll hold the gold camp flower," he said to his pards. "Go inside an' fetch out the baby."

They looked at one another for a moment, and hesitated.

"Go!" thundered their leader. "Remember that we act as the Banded Blades!"

One of the foremost sprung to the door, and his foot was across the threshold, when he was struck with something from the inside, and came reeling back half-insensible.

"What! is the big kitten goin' ter fight for once?" cried Windy Rube, flinging Mountain Myra without ceremony among his men. "I'll toss him out, boys; keep the girl back!" And into the cabin he dashed with the ferocity of a tiger.

The men outside heard a brief struggle and some fierce oaths from Windy Rube, and a minute later they saw him reappear at the door with the Tahoe Infant panting and colorless in his clutches.

"Blamed ef he didn't fight," laughed the burly rough catching sight of his pards by whom Myra was gently held. "I could hev knocked him inter the middle ov next week, but thet would hev spoiled the after-piece. You wouldn't give the baby up, girl: wal, we took him!"

The Infant did not open his mouth; the dark faces seemed to have struck him dumb; but his eyes were full of mute pleading when they encountered the young girl's gaze.

"Come along, boys," continued Windy Rube to his companions. "Let the girl go and remain at home. We've played one tragedy through since noon; now we'll play another."

The hand of the leader of the Blades clutched the big boy's shoulder, he glanced with mad triumph at him when he concluded.

A moment later the hands that held Myra dropped away and Windy Rube pushed the Infant forward.

"Tiger! what are you going to do with him?" cried the girl, and she would have sprung forward if Faro Phil had not interposed his left arm.

"Thet remains ter be seen," was the answer couched in a brutal laugh. "Don't follow us."

"You dare not take his life! There is one who thinks the world of Tahoe."

"An' that one is Mountain Myra, eh?" cried Windy Rube.

"No. I am his friend, but he has another."

"Who?"

"Harm him and see."

The ruffian thought for a moment.

"Oh! Modoc Kate!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Somehow or other, she's taken an interest in the big babe from Tahoe, but I don't fear her vengeance. Wal, we're off now, Myra. When we come back, you'll get an account of the picnic."

The band moved off, leaving the young girl spellbound and statue-like in the dusk before the cabin.

Like a lot of mountain eagles, the Banded Blades had swooped down upon the little cabin and carried off the Tahoe Infant despite her intentions to protect the boy.

"They will let Windy Rube carry out his designs!" she cried. "The men-tigers of Bowie Bar think nothing of human life. That boy is innocent of all wrong-doing. He would hardly fight for himself. His death would be a crime of crimes. Well, it will be terribly avenged if they go that far."

Already the roughs of Bowie and their prisoner had vanished, and Myra went back into her cabin.

Twenty minutes passed away.

At the end of that time a slight noise brought Mountain Myra to the door and as she opened it a man started back.

"What! you here?" exclaimed the girl springing after him and clutching his sleeve before he could get away. "I hate you, Stanislaus Steve, but you can make me your friend."

"How?" cried the astonished man.

"By saving the Tahoe Infant. He is in the hands of the Blades. They've taken him to the tmountain—that way. Quick!" and she pushed he desperado away.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HANGING IN THE GULCH.

"LET them deal with him. It's not my mix," said Stanislaus who had so unexpectedly come back to Bowie Bar as he halted a few feet from the girl and eyed her strangely.

"Very well, then; have my hate forever!" was the answer. "You drove him from camp and was the cause of all his trouble. Yet, you stand there while Windy Rube and his Blades may be taking the poor boy's life. Shame! Stanislaus Steve! If you will not help, the boy leave me. I will not talk to a coward!"

Mountain Myra turned away with the last word which accompanied a look of contempt.

The sport sprung forward but she waved him back.

"No! you can't help the boy you cursed and banished. I want nothing to do with a coward!"

The door of the cabin shut with a bang behind her, and the gold camp desperado found himself left suddenly alone.

"Thet's what I call cool business," he said to himself, staring at the door which did not open. "She wants me to put my foot in it by attempting to take the Infant from the Banded Blades. Well, not if this rustler knows himself, my camp flower. However, I'll go an' see what they ar' goin' ter do with the baby."

Facing about, Stanislaus Steve followed the same trail taken a few minutes before by the Banded Blades who had the big boy in their keeping.

He looked to his weapons as he moved along, for although he had been an inhabitant for some years of Bowie Bar, he was on dangerous ground, dangerous because Windy Rube and his friends hated him.

The trail to the mountain was not difficult to follow, for night had not yet come, and objects were still visible some distance ahead.

When he had left the camp proper and found himself in a wild but romantic portion of the trail, he was suddenly startled by a human voice.

"I'd know that voice among a thousand!" he exclaimed. "Ah, my old friend an' rival, Windy Rube, I didn't settle you when I introduced you to my fist at Pilgrim Pete's door. I'll just go on an' see what low business you an' your pards ar' up ter. But as for interferin' for thet 'Tahoe baby—I guess not!"

The trail made an abrupt bend a few rods from the spot where Stanislaus spoke these words, and he pushed forward rapidly with much curiosity manifested in his look.

All at once he drew up alongside of a large rock and looked forward.

He had reached the angle just mentioned, and had a good view of the trail ahead.

"You ar' right, Mountain Myra; the pards ov Bowie mean business, sure enough!" he ejaculated.

Just ahead of his position were six figures visible in the gathering dusk and Stanislaus recognized them at a glance.

About thirty feet above their heads a sharp rock jutted out from the gulch wall like a beam, and from it dangled a dark rope, the lower end of which was furnished with a noose.

"I've got hyar in time ter see the fun," said Stanislaus Steve while he looked. "The executioners ar' gettin' their victim ready. Thistime Windy Rube's bound to make sure work ov the boy what hez stepped between him an' ther girl, as he thinks."

A moment of silence followed the last sentence, and then the bronze spectator heard Windy Rube's coarse voice say:

"I'll trot 'im under the string, boys, an' when I give the signal you will hoist the laby up. No fool work this time. When I make up my mind ter rid camp ov a nuisance, I generally do it."

The big ruffian went toward the dangling rope with the boy, whom they had forced to the infamous spot.

"Hang me ef they hevn't gagged 'im so he can't beller," ejaculated Stanislaus with a look of surprise. "An' tied his hands on his back, too! Thet's too mean an' cruel for a boy like thet. By Jehu! I've a notion ter wade in an' spoil yer fun, dogs ov Bowie Bar!"

He noisily drew a revolver half way from his belt and cocked it; but a moment later he slipped it back.

"It isn't my picnic," he went on. "I'd get riddled ef I attempted ter help the baby pard. He's made love ter Myra an' thet's enough ter keep my hands off," and the Tahoe Infant was thus left to his fate.

In less than a minute Windy Rube had conducted the boy to the noose which he seized and put over his whitened face.

The look of pain and the pleading in the boy's big brown eyes had no effect on his heart of adamant.

He had resolved that his cruelty should be carried to the extreme, that the Tahoe Infant should die.

It was true that the ruffians had gagged the boy.

They were afraid that a cry from his lips would fetch somebody to his assistance, for, though called brave men and desperadoes, cowards they were at best.

Stanislaus saw them all from where he stood.

He recognized Faro Phil, and all the rest, but the most conspicuous member of the group was Windy Rube.

This hard case drew the noose of the lasso taut under the infant's chin.

"Now pick up the rope an' haul away when I lift my hand," he said to his men. "We'll swing him up out of reach ov the mountain wolves. It's good-by to ther Tahoe Infant. Blame mel ef Bowie Bar has prospered rightly since his laugh war first heard hyar."

Three men took up the loose end of the rope that dangled from the stone beam overhead and looked at Windy Rube.

Faro Phil stood near by with his back turned on these proceedings, and with his face toward Stanislaus.

"Face ther music, Faro!" cried Windy Rube suddenly, catching sight of his pard's position. "Don't play the girl just because we're goin' ter hoist a kid toward the stars. About face thar, Faro."

"Never!" was the response in tart, mad tones. "I've said I wouldn't, an' I won't. Thar!"

Windy Rube's face suddenly grew dark.

A quick spring bore him to the spot where Faro Phil had planted himself like a statue.

"Hyar! Faro," and Rube's hand descended on his pard's shoulder. "You're a Blade an' you mustn't shirk now."

"I do when it comes ter hangin' a boy!" was the quick answer. "You can't make me see it, Windy Rube. I say in the teeth ov all hyar thet it is the meanest act the Banded Blades ever committed, an'—"

"Wal, what?" cried Rube.

"An' I hope the blood ov thet kid will fall back upon the heads ov the men thet shed it. Thar!"

Windy Rube stepped back, and with a pair of flashing eyes glared for a moment tigerishly at the man who had crossed him.

Out of the corners of his eyes Faro Phil saw it all, and with teeth that had clinched the last word, waited for him to go on.

"All right, Faro," suddenly grated Windy Rube. "I'll take all the risks an' toss the babe heavenward. We can't stand hyar all night. Ready ar' ye, pards?"

The three men who held the rope ready to jerk the doomed boy off his feet by a downward pull, replied with looks of readiness and eagerness.

Windy Rube stepped to where they could all see him at the same time.

"Ready now," he said. "Up goes the boy Jonah ov Bowie Bar, an' woo to the galoot who cuts him down ag'in' orders. Pull, pards!"

With the utterance of the last words the desperado's right hand shot into the air, and a second later the body was lifted from the ground.

The jerk was so sudden that it forced the gag from the boy's mouth, and a wild cry rent the air as the infernal rope suddenly tightened!

Faro Phil turned half-way around and put his hand on the butt of his pistol.

"No!" said Windy Rube, with a glance at him. "No interference with my business, Faro. Remember that you are one of the Banded Blades!"

Already, fifteen feet from the ground, the body of the Tahoe Infant was swaying in mid-air, between the walls of the gulch.

The men below still clung to the rope, which they had manipulated at their leader's command, and that leader was looking on with a ruffian's triumph in his baleful eyes.

"Make the rope fast to yonder rock!" he said to the three.

"Lower that body! Down with it at once, or we'll kill the men who strung it up!"

These were startling words to follow the orders which were about to complete the deed of villainy.

"Who said that?" roared Windy Rube, whirling toward Faro Phil, who had turned around and looked startled. "Did you speak, Faro?"

"No; I spoke," said the same voice, and there stepped into the trail two persons, side by side, and Windy Rube and his pards had the amazement to look into three revolvers.

"Modoc Kate!" ejaculated the boss desperado.

"An' the boy tramp," said Big Bart, "Nugget Ned!"

There they stood, with leveled weapons, only a few feet from the startled sports.

"Down with your victim, and be careful about it," said the Trigger Queen. "Thank God! I came in the nick of time. Count ten for me, boy. They know what it means!"

Windy Rube, who had been almost startled out of his senses, glanced at the men who held the rope.

It was an exciting tableau, the like of which, it would be safe to say, the gold hills had never witnessed before.

Nugget Ned, who was Modoc Kate's companion, began to count.

Well did the sports of Bowie Bar know what it meant.

Without a command from their speechless leader, the three toughs began to lower their victim at the second numeral, and the boy had not reached the seventh one ere the Tahoe Infant touched the ground as gently as a mother lays her infant down.

So much for the potent influence of three deringers.

"By me this deed will never be forgotten," said Modoc Kate, to the leader of the Blades. "If the boy is dead, vengeance shall be taken; if he lives I may restrain my hand. Go back to your camp, tigers of California. If I enter it it will be for war—for vengeance! Must a boy who never harmed a living soul, be hunted down and hung by a lot of hounds who deserve death every moment of their lives? And this boy of all others, too! Back to Bowie Bar, infamous Blades, and you, Windy Rube, devil incarnate, will feel some day the hand of Modoc Kate."

"All right, my daisy. I accept the challenge," growled the big sport, savagely. "But ere I go, thar's one thing I'd like ter know—what's the Tahoe Infant ter you?"

A sudden spasm of indignation took possession of the woman's countenance.

She went forward till she stood beside the body from whence she looked at the boss of Bowie Bar.

"What's a child to its mother?" she said.

"Jerusalem!" cried Windy Rube, starting back. "Is thet kid yer child?"

"He is mine! Now, villain of villains, about face and move toward camp, or to-night's crime will make me send a bullet through your head!"

That was enough.

The voice told Windy Rube that it was exceedingly dangerous for him to remain another moment where he was.

He looked a second over Modoc Kate's revolver into her stern face and flashing eyes.

"To camp!" he growled, to his pards. "Great Jehu! her revelation takes my breath. Ther Infant her flesh an' blood? Why, she's lived five years beside him an' never owned him afore!"

The men who glanced over their shoulders ere they left the gulch saw both Modoc Kate and the boy who had come with her stooping over the body on the ground.

Stanislaus Steve crouched behind the rock from which he had witnessed the startling scenes, and saw Windy Rube and his pards go by.

"Thet kid her boy! What do you think of it, Bart?" suddenly asked Windy Rube.

"I think it's a lie!" was the answer.

"So do I; but Faro yonder looks as if he b'lieves it. Mother an' child? Nol! She'd hev owned him afore this. Ef he's alive, it's by a hair. Ho! ho! We'll hunt up Pilgrim Pete an' make him tap a new barrel."

Pilgrim Pete?

What! has the fellow found Crested Hawk?

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DRAMA UNDER GROUND.

THE reader will recollect that the last we saw of Pilgrim Pete he was entering the Ophir mine in pursuit of Flash Dan's Indian pard, who had cleaned out the Smiling Corpse Saloon, and left its proprietor in a dilapidated condition.

It was in the depths of this same mine that we had the last glimpse also of the Nevada Nabob, when he stood alone in a stone-walled chamber, with a torch swinging over his head, and his body covered by the deadly revolvers of the Banded Blades.

We have seen the gold camp desperadoes emerge from the mine intact as to numbers, and swearing that they had put from their path forever Flash Dan of Nevada.

If this is true, then the Nabob had failed in the most important part of the mission that had brought him to Bowie Bar: he had not paid the Blades for the banishment from Nugget City five years before, neither has he seen Mountain Myra, the girl whom he believed to be the child of Lonely Jack, his partner of the banishing.

If Windy Rube and his pards have not finished the man from Nevada, let them hereafter keep out of his way.

Finding his way with ease from corridor to corridor, which were so dark that a hand placed almost against a human face could not be seen by the keenest of eyes, went Crested Hawk, the half-naked and panther-like Klamath, in his search for Flash Dan.

The man he had saved from starvation among the Shasta mountains years before, he would reach and succor again if possible.

He had heard the boasts of Windy Rube and pards when they came forth from the cave; they had made his eyes flash fire, and he had held back his hand only by a superhuman effort.

Woe to the Banded Blades if the Indian finds Flash Dan riddled with bullets in Ophir mine!

He seemed to know the interior of the place, and yet no one could say that he had ever been there before.

Not once did he stop to listen whether anybody was on his track.

He never thought of Pilgrim Pete, therefore he did not dream that that ruffian was on his trail with a shotgun.

In a marvelous manner the red-skin avoided the many pitfalls that beset his way, and he went deep down into the mine of many dark avenues, which were supplied with air from unknown quarters.

Where was Flash Dan?

If dead, would the tireless trailer ever find him?

"Great God! it war the closest shave ov my career," said the deep voice of a man who leaned against the wall of a chamber dark as Erebus, and looked up at a spark that glimmered above him like a far-away star. "The torch must have blinded the shooters ov Bowie Bar an' disconcerted them. Fools they were ter go back without comin' down hyer to see whether they had finished the hustler from Hustlersville. I'd hev thought ye'd hev done thet, Windy Rube. Wal, I'm alive, with a clipped cheek an' grazed temple. With all thet shootin', it war nothin' more. I'm under obligations ter ye, Windy, but the next man you shoot at you'll not leave till ye've inspected ther corpse. How am I ter get out o' this? thet's ther question!" And the speaker laughed. "Thet spark hangin' up thar is the last ov the torch they left behind. I can't reach it, an' the rope thet b'longs ter it. I must get out ov this trap some other way."

But how?

In all his life, Flash Dan had never encountered such a puzzling question.

Fifty times and more he had circumnavigated, as it were, the walls of that underground prison to which the Blades of Bowie Bar had consigned him after his capture, and always with the same result.

There was no outlet.

Now, after the most miraculous escape of his life, after the pards of Bowie had left him for dead under the torch they had suspended in mid-air over his head, he still found himself a prisoner, but anxious to get out, and burning to complete his work.

As we have seen, the torch had burned out, and the only sign of its existence was the one spark that flickered like a star in the gloom.

Flash Dan knew that it was suspended at the end of a rope, but it was beyond his reach, and all attempts to climb the wall to it would prove futile.

He could only lean against the dark wall and look at the fiery glow.

All at once a stone dropped at Flash Dan's feet from above and startled him.

No other noise than its falling was heard, though the Nevada Nabob listened intently.

"Only a stone loosened by some process ov nature—nothin' more," he said to himself. "I'm in for it hyer a while longer. Great Jehu! wouldn't I stir the inhabitants ov Bowie ef I hed swing on ther outside for a few minutes? What's that?"

This time it was not a stone falling from the darkness overhead.

The spark on the torch was swaying back and forth as if somebody was moving the rope attached to it.

Flash Dan watched it with bated breath and burning curiosity; he looked at it like a man who has suddenly taken hope in the midst of despair.

What did it mean?

Who was at the rope and in what shape had the deliverer come?

At last the spark of fire moving still began to approach the floor of the cavern.

The Nevada Nabob stepped forward without the slightest noise and kept his eyes riveted upon it.

Lower and lower it came until when within three feet of the bottom it stopped and did not move.

"Somebody's up thar," murmured the silver sport. "He's decided ter come down, I think. Mebbe Windy Rube's come back ter inspect ther corpse!"

Dan's last sentence told how he wished that it might be the boss of Bowie Bar.

True he had no weapons of defense excepting the iron fists at the ends of his muscled arms, but they were enough for Windy Rube if he chose to risk himself back in the cavern.

The seconds seemed hours to the Nevada Nabob who stood near the rope waiting for the next step in the drama in the dark.

He knew that somebody was descending the rope into the depths of the chamber.

It was a thrilling moment.

All at once something dropped at Flash Dan's feet with that peculiar noise made by the panther when it alights on the ground from a leap from a limb.

"Ugh! all dark hyer!" said a voice.

The Nabob started.

In an instant the tones sent a thrill to his heart and he put a hand forward in the gloom.

"Thank fortune, Hawk. I am hyer," he said.

"Flash Dan!" was the quick response. "Crested Hawk has found his white brother."

"Wal, I should remark," said the Nevada

sport as his fingers encircled the hand he had found in the dark. "How did you find the rope?"

"The hands of the Klamath felt it."

"Good! whar ar' Windy Rube an' pards?"

"Gone back to the camp."

"B'lievin' they hed settled me forever?"

"Yes, brother."

"They're the most mistaken galoots on this rollin' ball!" laughed Flash Dan. "Injun, you came in the nick ov time. One pard came down ther rope, but two will go up."

The hands fell apart and the Klamath said at Dan's ear:

"They took Crested Hawk's knife from over the white man's bar, but he will find it."

"You've been thar, then?"

"Crested Hawk went back for his bowie, but it war gone."

"I could hev told ye thet."

"But he left the fire-water of the white man on the floor."

"Got mad an' cleaned the trap out, eh?" chuckled the Nabob.

"Yes, and the Hawk left the whisky spider in his broken web."

The answer seemed to afford the red-skin great delight.

"Ye've got all Bowie ag'in' yer for thet deed," said Flash Dan. "Touch the whisky supply ov this mountain rest, an' you touch every rustler in it. But never mind, Hawk. We'll git out ov this den in ther first place; then we'll paint a few spots red."

Dan put his hand on the rope while he spoke.

"Didn't Windy Rube an' pards shoot Dan?" asked the Klamath.

"Slightly. The darn fools hung a flarin' torch before their eyes an' then blazed away. Thet's whar they missed it. They should hev hed the fire behind them, an' thet's why I'm hyer."

The Indian was satisfied, for he said no more.

Fifteen minutes afterward the two pards, so well met, stood above the pit, and in a dark corridor with a firm floor, thanks to the rope.

"Push ahead," said Flash Dan, in eager tones. "I'm achin' ter inform the galoots ov Bowie Bar thet I'm still a hustler from Hustlersville. Great Caesar! won't there be a general droppin' ov cards when next I take a hand in ther game?"

"Come on, then," said the Indian. "The Klamath will show Flash Dan the white snakes' trail."

With Crested Hawk in the lead, the two pards of Silverdom started on the back trail.

They could not see a foot before their faces, but the man who had found his way from the opening was certainly shrewd enough to get back.

"You tell me thet the girl has come back, eh?" suddenly whispered Flash Dan.

"She is here. Crested Hawk see her lookin' from her cabin not long ago."

"Thet suits me!" ejaculated Dan. "I'll soon get ter compare her face with the picture in the locket you found among the mountains. But she is Lonely Jack's girl—the one he war huntin' five year ago when he struck Nugget City ter be lied on an' banished. Curse you, Windy Rube! Thet war yer work—yers an' yer pards. You made Lonely Jack Flash Dan's friend that night—his friend, an', by Jehosaphat, his avenger!"

Hardly had the last word fallen from the silver sport's lips, ere a loud voice rung out in the corridor.

"Halt! Black as it is, I've got the drop on you, you bottle-breakin' Greaser!" said the voice. "Thar's a shotgun double-charged within five feet ov yer head. Look out! I'm goin' ter blow it off!"

Crested Hawk had halted and stood like a statue, his back touching his companion's bosom.

"When you clean out the Smilin' Corpse ag'in, you'll let me know aforehand, I reckon," the voice went on. "I've got the dead drop, an' I'm goin' ter use it, too!"

The following moment a metallic click ran through the gloom, and then the curse of a disappointed man.

"Confound the gun!"

The shotgun at Pilgrim Pete's shoulder had snapped, and in an instant he realized the peril in which it had placed him.

As for Crested Hawk, he went forward like an arrow hurled from a catapult, and with a sharp pantherish cry.

Flash Dan heard him collide with something in the corridor, and then followed the mad grinding of the Indian's teeth.

He heard, also, a fierce struggle between two men, and then the naked arm of the Klamath touched his hand.

"Crested Hawk fix him!" hissed the red-skin.

"Windy Rube? No!" and Flash Dan grasped the Klamath's wrist. "You forget that I'm goin' ter deal with Windy. I hev promised—"

"This is the fire-water fool!" interrupted the Indian. "Let Flash Dan wait for the Hawk whar he stands."

Before the silver sport could reply, the Indian was gone, and Flash Dan imagined that he could

see him dragging down the dark shaft the human being he clutched at the throat.

The eyes of the red-man blazed.

He did not stop until he reached the edge of the pit from which he had lately rescued the man from Nevada.

Then he lifted a human body above his head, and, with a vengeful cry, flung it downward.

After that, he started back.

Pilgrim Pete had found the Klamath!

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON DECK AGAIN.

THE gang headed by Windy Rube found no fresh barrel on tap at the Smiling Corpse Saloon when they reached it fresh from the brutal scene of the Tahoe Infant's hanging in the gulch.

Pilgrim Pete had not, of course, returned from his Indian hunt, and if the Banded Blades had concluded to wait for him, their vigil would have exhausted their patience.

From the dark depths of the old mine the bar-keeper was never to emerge.

The vengeance of the merciless Klamath had overtaken him, and the snapping of his gun had cost Pilgrim Pete his life.

Windy Rube and his thirsty pards ransacked the saloon in their endeavors to find something to clear their dusty throats, but Crested Hawk in his madness had made pretty clean work of it, and they were doomed to disappointment.

"We'll skin thet red destroyer alive when we catch 'im!" grated the head desperado. "He broke everything breakable, Pilgrim Pete's head included, I guess. I swear, by all thet's holy, thet we'll settle one ov these times with thet Injun for this affair!"

"If you do it'll be arter I've seen him," murmured Grizzly Dick in whose belt still stuck the silver-handled bowie which had caused so much trouble and misfortune. "I'm not goin' ter forget for a moment thet thet infernal Greaser hed his red fingers at my windpipe. Ov course you've fixed Flash Dan, Windy, but I'm ter fix the red-skin."

After the search for whisky, Windy Rube went to his own cabin and closed the door with a curse behind him.

The night that closed about Bowie Bar found him there still, but not entirely alone.

One by one, as if by previous agreement, the famous Blades of the gold camp had come to him, and they began a secret caucus with closed doors.

What was to be done?

Not only were the Blades all there with the exception of Solid Saul, who, as the reader will recollect, died before Modoc Kate's deadly weapon in the mountain, but the possessor of the silver-handled bowie had come to the rendezvous.

A couple of candles stuck in the walls afforded all the light that illuminated the place, and but partially revealed the dark eyes, swarthy costumes and faces of the brethren of the border knife.

"Pards ov Bowie," said Windy Rube standing up in the midst of the crowd, "we ar' hyar ter fill a vacancy in our ranks. Solid Saul is either dead or a deserter. When we instituted the order ov the Banded Blades we said thet we should have power ter fill all vacancies made by desertion or death. Solid Saul war sent on a mission from which he should hev come back long ago. The man we shot ter pieces in the mine said he did not wipe him out, but Flash Dan might hev lied. Pard, we'll count Solid Saul dead an' in his place we can have a man who will not shrink when danger comes."

Several Blades glanced at Grizzly Dick, who, during Rube's speech, had watched him with much interest.

"Step ter the front, Grizzly," continued Windy Rube.

The brawny desperado advanced a step.

"Thar he is!" exclaimed Windy Rube as his outstretched finger covered the knife-stealer. "We all know him, pards. Shall we make Grizzly Dick one ov us?"

The "yes" that replied fell in unison from the entire band.

"Then take the oath, Grizzly. Hold up yer bowie!"

The hand of Grizzly Dick moved toward his belt, and quickly elevated the stolen bowie above his head.

"Hold on, thar!" said Faro Phil calmly. "I object ter the oath by thet Greaser's bowie. We swore by our own knives in the Shasta kentry—"

"I swear by my own knife hyer!" cried Dick, his eyes suddenly flashing, as he looked at the man who had objected.

"Yers by conquest, but the Injun's still!" was the answer.

"Swear by yer own knife, Grizzly," said Windy Rube.

"I do. This blade is mine!"

The bronzed novice was determined to carry his point.

"It's a small matter ter growl over—a mighty small point," he went on, casting an unpleasant look at Faro Phil. "The man who says this bowie isn't mine dares not challenge me ter prove it! I took it from over Peter's bar; why?—because the meanest red-skin in Californy choked me. It is mine until I give it back ter

him as I expect ter—under his skin! I swear by this bowie, or not at all."

The last sentence was resolution itself.

The uplifted arm fell suddenly at the speaker's side, and he threw a hasty glance toward the door.

Faro Phil did not reply; but his eyes told plainly that the words of Grizzly Dick had not cowed him.

"Hev ye no other bowie with ye?" asked Windy Rube.

"None! I want none, but this," and Dick patted the hilt of the weapon he had thrust back into his belt. "If I can't use this one hyer, I kin git."

"I'm afraid thet the boys will hardly consider thet one—"

"My property!" interrupted Dick in hissing tones. "Very well! I war invited ter this place. Remember thet I didn't ask ter become one ov ther Blades ov Bowie. No! I ginerally fight my own battles; but because I was invited hyer I came ter be one ov ye. I'd like ter know why this knife isn't mine? Mebbe I got it before some other feller made up his mind ter take it from the busted lookin'-glass! Wal, gents ov Bowie, make up yer minds about this matter. Suit yerselves, don't consult my wishes. I say hyer thet I'm not particular. If ye want me I'm willin' ter serve; if not, I'll be satisfied; but as for takin' ther oath under any other bowie but this, by Jehosaphat! I will not!"

That more than settled it so far as Grizzly Dick was concerned.

Windy Rube glanced at Faro Phil whose cold eyes and general expression told that he would not yield his objections.

Grizzly Dick with his burly figure drawn to its true height stood indifferent but a step from the door.

He was not particular how the matter was decided.

"Oh, let him swear!" said one of the men out of patience.

"We cannot if one pard objects," answered Windy Rube glancing again at Phil.

"Give in, Faro. Waive the point. He says ther knife ar' his—"

"No!" was the monosyllable that parted Faro Phil's lips. "I consider that knife the property ov the Injun who left it over Pilgrim Pete's bar."

Grizzly Dick bit his lip.

"Mebbe ye'r thet red hustler's friend!" he flashed.

"I am not. By heaven! I'd shoot him on sight!" was the instant reply.

"You say thet the bowie b'longs ter him?"

"Yes."

"An' I sha'n't swear my way inter ther brotherhood by it."

"No."

"All right!" cried Grizzly Dick.

"Gentlemen, thar be no oath from this gold-camp galoot ter-night. I shall bid ye all adieu."

He reached the door as he spoke the last word, and laid his dark hand on the wooden latch.

"Give in," said Windy Rube in low tones to Faro Phil. "He'll well replace Solid Saul."

"Not while he swears by the Injun's bowie," was the resolute retort. "I'll be Faro Phil and Solid Saul both first!"

The Blade was determined.

"Hyar I go," said Grizzly Dick, as he looked at the group from the door. "When you want me ag'in I'll not be on hand. Ther Blades ov Bowie kin git along without this chick. Good-night, boyees."

He opened the door and let a flood of starlight into the cabin but only for a moment.

All at once a figure leaped against the gold-camp rough, and, while one hand shot at his throat, another darted at his belt.

There was a momentary struggle in the doorway, and then the body of Grizzly Dick came reeling back among the Banded Blades!

He fell heavily to the floor as if flung there by a superior force, and the men who sprung over him to the door with mad oaths found—nobody!

Grizzly Dick seemed to have encountered a real thunderbolt which had both dazed and crushed him.

The attack had not occupied a minute.

"Who war it?" cried Windy Rube as the sport on the floor got upon his feet. "In the name ov Satan, what did yer run ag'in', Grizzly?"

For half a minute there was no answer, and Grizzly Dick stood in the center of the cabin staring like a man bereft of reason at the open door.

"Didn't ye see him?" he said at last.

"No! It war all over in a second. Ye hed just reached ther door when back ye came like a ball shot from a cannon. Ef thar hadn't been any floor ter this shanty ye'd hev gone clear through inter ther Ophir. See him? No! Who war it?"

"Thet empty belt tells the story," and Dick held up to the gaze of all the leather belt which a moment before had encircled his body. "Don't ye see thar's no silver-handled bowie thar any longer?"

The Blades of Bowie looked at the broken belt speechless for a moment.

"War it the Injun?" asked Windy Rube.

"That's the cyclone thet hit me in the door!" flashed Grizzly Dick through clinched teeth. "Jehu! who war thinkin' ov him hyar? Now, boyees, I couldn't swear by thet bowie ef ye wanted me ter? But I will git it back! I'm willin' ter swear by ali that's holy thet thet knife will change hands ag'in inside of forty-eight hours! The red fool don't know me. Who looked for 'im out thar? All ther time we war talkin' hyer, ther coppery panther war crouched at yer door, Windy, ready fer ther first galoot thet passed out. He's back in ther camp. Pilgrim Pete didn't find him; but this mountain rustler will!"

Once more the madman of Bowie Bar moved toward the door, but this time he was not molested, and the pards of the gold camp saw him pass out and vanish.

"We'll git along without him," said Faro Phil, the first of the band to speak. "Let him find that red-skin if he can. He didn't carry his point ter-night. No galoot swears himself into this brotherhood under a bowie not his own!"

A little while afterward the speaker and all, with the exception of Windy Rube, took their departure, leaving the candles in the wall shedding their light over the boss rough of the mountain camp.

"Now I'll see about Myra's stay here," he said aloud to himself. "She's come back somewhat ag'in' her will, but back all the same. Stanislaus will keep his distance since I'm hyer. He'll never attempt ter carry her off any more. By heavens! I'll get even with him for the two blows he dealt. As for Modoc Kate, oh, I kin handle her even if our hangin' did settle the Tahoe Infant. Her child? I don't b'lieve it!"

"That's just what he is, Windy Rube!"

The door had not been shut since the departure of the Blades, and Windy Rube stepped back several feet at the sound of these words.

His eyes seemed to start from his head from amazement, for the man whose giant figure almost filled the door seemed to Windy Rube an apparition from the little cemetery on the mountain-side.

"Did you really hang that baby?" continued the man in the door. "Open yer talk-trap, Windy, an' give me satisfaction!"

"Yes! we pulled him up," blurted the amazed desperado. "But Modoc Kate's shooter brought him down ag'in."

"Dead?"

"I didn't stay ter see. But in the name ov heaven! whar did you come from?"

"From the depths ov Ophir mine. Hold yer hands back, Windy. I'm not hyer for yer blood, but by ther flames ov perdition! if you lift a finger toward yer belt, I'll paint the wall behind you with some ov ther best blood in Bowie!"

Windy Rube did not move.

"Five years ago you tied me to Lonely Jack in the camp in Shasta Land an' sent us both to the grizzlies ov the mountains," the man in the door went on. "You made us pards till death with yer lazos. I am hyer; Lonely Jack perished in the gold lands. He came to Nugget City on his hunt for a lost—a stolen child—a girl. He died without findin' her. I took up the trail whar he left off, because you made us pards. Wal, I hev found Lonely Jack's daughter. Whar did you run across her, Windy?"

Windy Rube could not suppress an exclamation of surprise.

"We hev'n't got her!" he cried. "I never saw Lonely Jack's child."

"You hev! She's been an inhabitant ov Bowie Bar for years, I'm told."

"Who?—Myra?"

"Myra!"

"Wal," hissed Rube, "we can't give 'er up!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NABOB'S LUCK.

For a brief spell the Nevada Nabob was silent.

"Can't, eh?" he said with a dangerous smile.

"You mean yer don't want ter, Windy?"

"I mean we won't! thar!"

Flash Dan looked his persecutor of other days squarely in the eyes as he came forward with a gliding and noiseless motion.

"Hands down, sir!" he said sternly. "I've been to ther bottom ov Ophir mine. I'm fresh from ther bowels ov darkness an' death, an' I mean bizness! You say you won't give up Lonely Jack's girl? Wal, Windy, I came hyer principally ter find her, an' partly because you an' yer Blades invited me hyer when we met on ther streets ov Carson 'other day. You know me. Ah! Windy Rube, with thet cowardly banishment from Nugget City five years ago, dare you stand thar an' tell me that I can't hev my old pard's child?"

Windy Rube did not move, for he could not.

His back was against the wall, and he was obliged to face Flash Dan with his retreat completely cut off.

"Come with me," continued the silver sport. "Go with me to the cabin of the girl called Mountain Myra hyar, an' I'll convince you thet

she is Lonely Jack's lost child. I've got ther evidence on my person an' in a shape thet no livin' man can dispute. She's at Bowie Bar ter-night, I'm told. Come, Windy."

The boss of Bowie Bar seemed cowed by the lightning glances from the speaker's eyes.

He knew the man who confronted him.

On more than one occasion in the Shasta country he had seen his courage tested in a manner that reflected credit upon it.

There was not a drop of coward blood in Flash Dan's veins.

What, go with that cool desperado sport, his enemy, to Mountain Myra's cabin?

The proposition sent a repellent thrill through Windy Rube's frame.

Yet, how could he get out of it?

In the bronze right hand of the Nabob was a derringer at full cock, and, in the vernacular of the border, there was "shoot" in his eyes.

Windy Rube choked down his aversion under the circumstances and straightened.

"If you say go, go it is," he said, snappishly, to the Nevada sport. "I fancy that yer discovery will be a revelation to ther girl."

"Thar's no doubt ov thet," smiled Dan.

"She went with her mother a few months after her birth, for Lonely Jack an' his wife separated. He watched her grow up through girlhood an' got her picture without her knowledge. He told me ther hull story durin' our wanderings in ther mountains arter ther banishment."

"Do you know how she got hyer?" asked Windy Rube.

"Not for sartain, but I've an idea thet ther man who stole her when a little girl from her mother drifted ter Bowie with her."

"She came hyer 'bout six years ago with a monte man named Three-Card Sam, a spot dandy from the South."

"As his daughter?"

"Yes."

"Whar's he now?"

"Up yonder on the hill," said Windy Rube, with a significant look over his shoulder. "He took suddenly sick one night 'bout four years ago an' ther next mornin' we hed a plantin' on ther mountain-side. Ov course Myra stayed."

The two men while they talked thus were walking side by side among the cabins that stood in the calm starlight that clothed camp and mountain in weird beauty.

Their shoulders almost touched, and no spectator would have thought that it was a forced march on the part of one.

Windy Rube had suddenly become communicative concerning Mountain Myra's history.

Why should he keep it back?

The man at his side would know all some time, and he might as well tell him first as last.

A walk of several minutes brought the two men to a certain cabin, in front of which Windy Rube halted, with a glance at Flash Dan.

"Is this the place?" asked the silver Nabob.

"This is the girl's shanty. She's probably asleep. Shall I disturb her?"

"Ef yer please, Windy," said Dan, stepping back a pace, as he watched Rube with the eye of a hawk.

Windy Rube stepped up to the cabin door, and, after a brief pause, struck it several light raps with his knuckles.

The silence that followed was broken by no response, and Windy Rube shot Dan a look which said:

"I thought she was asleep."

"Try ther door," said the man from Nevada.

"I came hyer ter see Lonely Jack's daughter."

The leader of the Banded Blades laid his hand on the wooden latch and opened the door.

"It begins ter look ter me as ef the nest's empty," he said in low tones to Flash Dan.

"Empty? Myra gone?" And the Nabob was at Windy Rube's side in an instant.

"See hyer! ef you know anything ov this disappearance, by heavens! Windy Rube, I'll send you to the mountain ter keep Three-Card Sam company. I came hyer ter find Myra, I tell yer! She war hyer when the sun set. Do you tell me she's gone now?"

"We'll know in a minute," was the answer.

"I'll play fair with yer, Flash Dan. Ef Myra's gone, I swear thet I don't know whar she is, nor whar she went."

There was an honesty in the speaker's looks and tones that satisfied the Nevada sport.

"Very well. Go in. I'm at yer heels," he said.

It took but a moment for Windy Rube to clear the threshold of Mountain Myra's cabin, and the lucifer he struck on the wall inside showed him the anxious face of Flash Dan at his shoulder.

"Not hyer, by George!" he exclaimed, when the match, burning at its best over his head, showed him the interior of the cabin. "You kin see for yerself, Dan. Myra's gone."

The sport from silverdom seemed dazed by the emptiness that surrounded him.

His disappointment showed itself on every lineament of his swarthy face.

"No; Myra is not hyer," he said. "But never mind; I'll find her yet."

The match flickered and went out.

"Another match!" said the Nabob, suddenly.

"I thought I saw something."

"What war it like?"

"I hardly know. Strike another match."

Windy."

The gold camp sport produced a second lucifer from the pocket of his buckskin shirt, and again illumined the little cabin with its blaze.

"This ar' what I saw," said Flash Dan, as he stepped forward and picked a little bit of paper from the little table whose cover was a piece of soft buckskin.

He held the trophy up to Windy Rube as he spoke, and saw the gold sport's eyes dilate.

"Thet explains ther situation, mebbe," said Rube. "Read it, an' see, Dan."

He held the match so that the Nevadian could read the writing without difficulty, and watched him with great eagerness while he unfolded the paper.

"Wal, what says ther pointer?" he asked, as Flash Dan looked up and crushed the paper in his hand.

"Come; you kin throw down yer match, Windy," was the strange answer, devoid of all information.

Windy Rube looked the picture of blank astonishment.

"War thar nothin' on the paper?" he said.

"Yes."

"Wal?"

"It war for me. Pardon me, Windy Rube, ef I refuse ter impart any information."

The coolness of the silver sport made Rube's dark eyes emit sparks like flashes from heated iron.

Under his huge mustache he bit his nether lip.

"All right, old fox," he growled, under his breath. "Ther game's but half-played through. I'll make yer think ov this!"

He pursued his inquiry no further, for he knew that Flash Dan's answer had given him no hopes in that direction.

He threw down the match with a half-smothered oath, and turned toward the door.

"Ready!" said a deep-toned voice that must have sent a thrill to the hearts of the two sports.

"Kiver the door with yer droppers, Blades ov Bowie Bar, an' riddle the first galoot thet steps inter ther starlight!"

These words were not spoken in boisterous tones, but Windy Rube and Flash Dan heard them for all that.

"Jehosaphat!" ejaculated Rube, as he suddenly retreated till he touched the silver sport. "Ther Bowie wolves hev scented ye, Dan."

The next moment a stern command rung out on the crisp night air.

"Show yerselves in ther starlight, you galoots in ther shanty!" it said. "Ther door is covered by ther deadliest revolvers in Californy! Forward, march!"

Flash Dan's hand closed suddenly on Rube's arm.

"Go out!" he said.

"Me?" was the answer in startled tones. "Hevn't those pards out thar orders ter riddle ther man who shows himself first?"

"Yes. Keep yer mouth shut an' go forward. By the eternal! Windy Rube, I command in this shanty! Forward, march, I say. I give ye a second fer yer decision. My dropper is within an inch ov yer brains, an' I'll scatter 'em ef ye refuse ter obey! March!"

In vain the boss of Bowie Bar ground his teeth.

Certain death seemed to await him, do what he would.

"Come out!" cried the stern voice on the outside, and all at once Windy Rube leaped forward, crying:

"It's me!—yer pard!—Windy!"

The sudden resolution, the leap, and the loud announcement, undoubtedly saved the gold sport's life.

He landed nearly ten feet from the door, and in the presence of four men who held revolvers in both hands.

"Windy! by Jehu!" exclaimed one of the men. "Wal, thet beats creation!"

"Who'd yer think it war?" was the retort, as Windy Rube picked himself up, for in his leap he had struck the shanty's sill and landed on his face. "Ef yer want the boss devil ov the West, kiver thet door. He's in thar yet."

"Who?"

"Flash Dan."

"Ther galoot we shot ter pieces in the mine? I guess not, Captain Rube."

"He is! I swear it! By ther forked tail ov his Satanic Majesty—"

"Oh, come, Windy! We've scared ther truth out ov yer. Flash Dan is whar we left 'im—in Ophir. You war talkin' ter Myra."

"To Flash Dan, I say!"

"Stick ter it! that's right!" was the tantalizing answer. "Look hyer, Windy. You don't pull ther wool over our eyes in thet manner. Flash Dan the dead in thar? Wal, hardly! And before the enraged sport of Bowie could remonstrate further, he was wheeled about by his companions, and found himself being marched off in an opposite direction.

When he caught his breath again, he stopped, and planting himself firmly on the ground, re-

iterated his statements in a manner that carried conviction with it.

The Blades believed and went back; they inspected the shanty and found it empty, but on the little table was written:

"Windy Rube told the truth for once. I'll see all of you later."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MAN IN MID-AIR.

"By Jehosaphat! they wouldn't believe me when I told 'em Flash Dan war in Myra's cabin till it war too late ter rope 'im in, now I've a notion ter let 'em deal with 'im without my help. Purty pards they ar', ain't they? Stay hyer an' fight it out with 'im when he sees yer later ez he said he would by writin' on ther table. I'm goin' off. Business of importance calls Windy Rube beyond ther sacred precincts ov Bowie Bar."

Of course the speaker or rather the growler was the leader of the Banded Blades, and the time of his speech was nearly twenty-four hours after the events of the chapter just closed.

Armed to the teeth and alone, he stood among the shadows of night at the edge of the gold camp with his face turned toward the collection of rough cabins.

"It's euthin' singular how an' why Myra went off so sudden," he went on. "She war in ther shanty at sundown, but when Dan an' I got thar, the nest war empty. Dan kept ter himself ther note he found on the table. Thet war a clew, but darn me, ef he'd tell me a word. Give up the mountain pink because he says she's Lonely Jack's child? Not much! Like a fool he spared me last night when I knew he wanted my blood. I'll give him a peck ov trouble afore he gets the girl, er my name's not Windy Rube, ov Bowie Bar."

The gold camp sport turned abruptly and started off with the last words of the final sentence dropping from his lips.

He went away with a resolute determination to find Mountain Myra, the girl who had again given Bowie Bar the slip.

In a little while the mountains that shadowed the camp swallowed up his giant figure, but he kept on.

Did he ever strike a trail in the dark? Or was he only hoping that fortune would set his feet on the young girl's track?

"I kin chaw up my size in wild-cats when I'm mad, an' I'm in thet delectable condition just now!" said a voice so suddenly that Windy Rube stopped in his tracks.

He was near some person whom he could not see, but certainly not many feet separated them.

The voice seemed to have come down from above, and he stood in the trail with a ready revolver in his hand, and with his face turned upward.

"I've heard thet voice afore," he said to himself. "Its owner has been to the Bar. Wait till he goes off ag'in."

Windy Rube did not have to wait long.

"I've heard ov predicaments afore, but this one ov mine skunks 'em all!" said the same voice.

"Ah! Grizzly Dick!" ejaculated Windy Rube. "What kind o' fix is the galoot in, anyhow? I don't want him with me on my mission; but I'll take a bird's-eye view ov his situation."

The last words uttered by the unseen man seemed to locate him to Windy Rube, for he sprung from the main trail and began to ascend a bridle-path that led up the mountain which was wildly rough, full of deep and narrow chasms or gulches which appeared in some instances almost fathomless.

Guided by the sound, the boss of Bowie Bar kept on.

"Ov course nobody 'll come!" growled the man in a fix. "I'm ter die hyer unavenged an' never thought ov. This wouldn't hev happened ef they had let me swear by the silver bowie last night. No! Faro Phil had ter object. I'd give an arm fer a dash at his throat this minute!"

The man ceased again, but Windy Rube was very near.

He wanted to see Grizzly Dick without letting that worthy know aught of his presence, and his movements were now as noiseless as the panther's, for he crept forward on all-fours with an unsheathed bowie in his right hand.

He was many feet above the spot on which he had heard the first words of the man from Bowie Bar.

Almost suddenly he came upon one of those deep gulches or mountain gaps whose depths are scarcely illumined by the sun even at noon-day.

He halted on the brink and listened.

"I'll wait till he goes off again!" he murmured.

The next moment the unseen man burst out again into a torrent of fury, and Windy Rube recoiled with a startled cry, half-smothered at his lips.

Within ten feet of his position the canyon was bridged by a fallen tree entirely destitute of limbs, and the sharp eyes of Windy Rube after looking for a moment made out a sight that sent a thrill to his vitals.

Hanging under the tree and midway between the walls of the chasm, he saw a man.

The rope that held him passed under his arms which were bound to his side, and another cord held his ankles lashed together.

Full of curiosity, Windy Rube crept nearer to the tree and at last by the aid of the myriads of stars that glittered overhead he looked down into familiar features.

"Grizzly Dick it is sure enough," he murmured. "I'd give a good deal ter know who got such a big advantage ov him ter serve him thet trick. One man couldn't do it, but thet infernal Injun is more devil than human."

For several minutes Windy Rube occupied the position last taken and regarded the man who was suspended over the dark abyss.

"I've seen hangin's afore—I've helped in forty—but this one beats ther hull lot," he said. "If I war sartain thet Grizzly wouldn't interfere with my girl-hunt, I'd get him out ov this pickle. He's human an' oughtn't ter die thus."

Windy Rube crept out on the log and laid his hand on the tight cord.

"Who's up thar?" cried the desperate man at the lower end.

"Thet's right! you've come back ter cut the rope hev ye? I'd rayther fall than hang hyer—darn sight. Cut the string, you miserable red snake! It'll slit yer throat one ov these days."

Windy Rube burst into a boisterous laugh which checked Grizzly Dick in an instant.

"Want ther rope cut, do yer, Grizzly?" laughed Rube. "Ef yer insist upon it cut it shall be!"

"Not by you, Windy! Great Jehu! you've come in ther nick ov time. Haul me up till I kin tech ther log then I'll be all hunky. Oh, won't I make vengeance shout when I git on the trail ov ther villains who did this?"

"Who did it?"

"Ov course thet Injun war one."

"An' ther other?—war he Flash Dan?"

"The dead sport? No! It was Stanislaus Steve."

"What?"

"Stanislaus it war! I don't see how he an' thet Injun became pards, but they did this, lassoed me first and when they thought they hed choked ther life out ov me carried me hyer an' hung me over this bottomless pit. Won't thar be a day ov reckonin', Windy?"

"Ef I war Grizzly Dick thar would be," was the answer.

"Ye'r goin' ter pull me up now, ain't yer?"

"I guess I am."

"Ov course. You can't be out ov sorts because I didn't j'ine ther brotherhood last night. Faro Phil objected just ez ef he knew thet red wolf war waitin' for me at ther door!"

Windy Rube threw himself astride of the log and bent over and seized the rope with both hands.

"Take a full breath," he said to Grizzly Dick.

"All right. I'll get it now."

A moment afterward the boss of Bowie Bar was pulling on the rope with all his might and saw that he was slowly raising Grizzly Dick from his uncomfortable position.

"Hold on!" suddenly cried Dick. "You must cut my hands loose, so I kin git a grip on the log an' help myself."

"True! I forgot thet, Grizzly."

The man was lowered, and Windy Rube bent over with his glittering bowie.

The cutting of the bonds that held the desperado's hands in thrall was the work of a moment.

"Now you kin help me up ter freedom, Windy!" ejaculated Dick. "Jumpin' crickets! won't ther Injun an' Stanislaus wish they'd never seen sunlight? I'll swear by ther silver-handled bowie yet, Windy. I'm a devil from Satansville; stir me, an' you rouse a tiger!"

Once more Windy Rube was slowly raising the doomed man toward the log.

It was the toughest pull of the gold sport's life, for Grizzly Dick was no infant, and it was like lifting dead weight to Windy Rube.

"Another inch, Windy," said Dick, as he raised his bronzed hands to grasp the log.

"Thet's all the space thet separates this gold-camp chick from freedom an' revenge. Look out, ye scoundrels who made me vulture-food! I'll make the mountains howl when I strike yer trail!"

It was the last inch that seemed hardest to overcome, and it taxed Windy Rube's strength to the utmost.

"Can't yer make it, Windy?" asked Dick.

"Let me blow a minute. Hang me! ef it ain't like pullin' an elephant out ov a canyon!"

Grizzly Dick gave a light laugh.

"Make a darn brief blow ov it; I want to get out ov this."

"No doubt ov that. Hyer goes ag'in."

Windy Rube braced himself for the last pull, and did not see the human figure that was creeping over the log toward him.

It was a half-naked figure, too, with long dark arms, a black scalp-lock, and a pair of eyes that flashed like diamonds.

"Ho! I touch the bark!" suddenly shouted Grizzly Dick.

The next instant the crawler darted at Windy Rube, and gave him a sudden push.

A wild yell of horror rung from the gold sport's throat, as he dropped the man he had nearly lifted to safety, and lost his balance.

Over the log he went in the flash of an eyelid, but he caught the figure swaying again over the dark canyon, and held on for dear life.

For a moment there was no sound; then all at once the wild place rung with a piercing yell of triumph.

It was enough to freeze the blood of the two desperadoes hanging in mid-air over the black abyss.

The cry and its echoes died away.

"Thus perish the stealer of Crested Hawk's knife an' the friend who tried to save his life!" said a voice unmistakably that of an Indian. "The Klamath will now go back to Flash Dan, his brother. An' when he has found Lonely Jack's child, an' paid the men who tied him with ropes years ago, they will both go back to the silver hills."

The voice ceased, and certain sounds told the two breathless ruffians that the red demon, who might have ended their career if he had but looked, was gone.

"Great Caesar, what a shave!" gasped Windy Rube. "I warn't thinkin' ov thet wildcat comin' back."

"Neither war I. But, for Heaven's sake, Windy, git away from me! This rope warn't made ter hold two pards like us."

At that moment the rope seemed to yield, for the two men suddenly dropped an inch lower.

"God above! ther knot's givin'!" cried Grizzly Dick. "Windy, this rope won't hold two men."

"It's doin' it now, ain't it?"

"Yes; but it can't last, I say."

"It must!" grated Windy Rube. "Just keep cool till I rekiyer my breath. It's only five feet up to ther tree, a thousand ter ther bottom ov ther canyon. Hold on! thet's my bowie ye'r' drawin' out!"

"Ov course it is!" was the hissed retort. "I say this rope can't hold two! One ov us must go up er down!"

The last word found a hand at Windy Rube's throat, and the boss of Bowie Bar saw the flashing eyes of Dick and his own bowie above him.

It was his most terrible moment!

CHAPTER XXVI.

BLOOD ON THE BLADE.

"I TELL ye, Windy," hissed Dick again, "this rope can't hold two!"

There was no reply, for the swarthy hand of the speaker was at the boss desperado's throat.

Windy Rube could only glare at the knife, poised in mid-air above his head, with eyes that seemed on the eve of starting from their sockets.

He clung desperately to the man whom he had tried to rescue from impending death in mid-air, and the two ruffians hung over the terrible canyon whose depths, probably a thousand feet below, they could not see.

If Crested Hawk had not come back, they might have stood on solid ground; now their lives seemed very near the close.

It was evident that the rope would not hold two very long.

That question was going to be decided by Grizzly Dick's uplifted knife.

Windy Rube could only look reply to the rough's threat.

"I'm goin' ter cut yer loose. I hev ter, Windy," said Dick after half a minute's pause.

The next instant, like a gleam of starlight, the knife came down!

It struck Windy Rube below the shoulder and his hands began to release Dick's garments.

"I had ter do it," murmured Grizzly Dick looking at the man over whose face an ashen hue was stealing. "A fellar has ter look out for himself first all ther time. It's good-by forever, Windy. Ef Faro Phil hed let me swear by ther silver-handled bowie when I wanted ter, I wouldn't have hed ter sarve ye thus. Now down ye go. I can't take ye up with me, ye know."

His hand at Windy Rube's weazen was all that kept that worthy from falling down into the canyon, and it suddenly unclosed as he finished the last sentence.

For a moment longer Windy Rube's fingers clung to Dick's form, then they broke their hold and the body dropped!

Dick turned his head away.

He did not attempt to follow the flight of the man he had sent toward the bottom of the canyon.

A minute later he had severed the cords that lashed his ankles together, and then made preparations to climb the rope to the log above.

As Rube had said, it was not over five feet to the natural bridge that spanned the canyon and Grizzly Dick soon covered the distance and seated on the log calmly threw the almost fatal lasso from his body.

Cutting it loose with the bowie he let it drop out of sight into the abyss below.

"Thar's yer rope, Windy," he said with a smile. "They'll find yer bones an' it together some day, an' will never connect me with 'em."

Now, you sneakin' red varmint! I'll rise afore ye like a specter before long, an' thar'll be suthin' done! Thought ye hed settled me when ye hung me over the mountain gap! An' Stanislaus, I'll remember ye too!"

He crept back over the log to the bank, and once more stood erect on solid ground.

"I call that a close shave—the closest ov my life. Ther rope might hev held two, but I war afraid ter trust it. Ov course I'm sorry, Windy, but it can't be helped now."

Of course it could not.

At that moment, with but little stretch of imagination, Grizzly Dick could see Windy Rube lying a shapeless mass of humanity at the stony bottom of the canyon.

He did not think of going down to see for himself, but suddenly turned away, and went up the mountain.

On the Indian's trail?

In his right hand, prepared for any emergency that might present itself, he carried the bowie which had just preserved his life, and his senses were on the alert as he moved along.

He need not have exercised this vigilance, for nobody was near to attack him, and the next day found him recovered from his terrible ordeal in mid-air, but still burning to meet the men who had subjected him to it.

"Mebbe fate 'll take 'em both back ter Bowie Bar," he said to himself. "Stanislaus hasn't given Myra up, I know. I'm goin' back thar."

The sun was high in the heavens when Grizzly Dick entered the gold camp and went straight to the shanty he called his own.

If he was noticed he was not questioned.

No one knew of the mid-air tragedy among the mountains.

Several hours later he emerged from his cabin, and appeared suddenly to the men who surrounded a deal table in the ruined saloon lately presided over by Pilgrim Pete.

The stakes were not large, but the roughs were playing with all their might, and Grizzly Dick came up and looked on without a word.

"Hevn't got the silver bowie back yet, eh?" suddenly cried one of the dark-faced players catching Dick's eye.

"Not yet, but I will!" he grated.

"Sartainly, Grizzly! We'll all git thar—in time!"

Instantly the brow of the gold sport darkened, but he kept back the quarrelsome retort that struggled to his lips.

"Hello! ye've got another bowie! Did ye trade with Windy?"

Grizzly Dick recoiled a step despite his coolness.

In an instant all eyes had become fixed on the bowie handle that was sticking above his leathern belt.

Fool he was to enter the den without hiding from view the knife as well known at Bowie Bar as its late owner.

The gamblers were on their feet.

"Whar did ye git that knife?" demanded Faro Phil as his eyes gave Grizzly Dick look for look. "He's swore he'd never sell nor trade, an' yet it's in yer belt, Grizzly."

"Did he say he'd never lose it?" was the retort.

"He never said that, but—"

"Wal, I found it," was the interruption. "I found it about three miles out ov camp, but I've no desire ter keep it."

He drew out the bowie and tossed it on the table among the cards and the stakes.

"Sartainly it b'longs ter Windy," he went on.

"I knew ther blade ther moment I sot eyes on it."

Faro Phil picked up the bowie, gave it a look which dilated his dark eyes and then exclaimed: "By hokey! thar's blood on it!"

"Ov course—the blood ov a young grizzly thet disputed ther mountain trail with me!" said Dick, with cool promptness. "I hed hardly picked up ther weapon till he tackled me, an' thet ther cub got ther worse ov the scrimmage thet b'ar blood tells. Whose blood did you think it war?—Rube's?"

There was no immediate reply.

"They say," continued Dick, with the assurance of a desperado, "they say thet they kin tell ther blood ov a man from a b'ar's with ther microscopes. Ef ye hev one ov 'em hyer ye'd hear thet blood growl! Say, when thet infernal red Greaser cleaned this trap out, didn't he leave one drop?"

Grizzly Dick turned his back on the Blades and walked coolly toward the dilapidated bar.

He knew that Crested Hawk had destroyed like a cyclone for he had visited the place after Flash Dan's doom in the mine, and had found nothing.

He did not see the glances quickly exchanged by Faro Phil and his pards.

Did they believe that Windy Rube had lost the bowie in the mountains, that the dark stains on its eight inches of steel was the blood of a bear?

From under their black lashes they watched Grizzly Dick as he inspected the broken bottles for a minute.

"Not a drop, curse the Greaser!" growled Dick, facing the group once more. "I thought he'd come back hyer ter play tiger once more:

thet's why I'm hyer. Say, did ye let Flash Dan git away last night?"

"Yes."

"He got away from ther hull set ov yer?"

"From every one," said Faro Phil.

"Thet's more than the Injun will do from this mountain chick! Say?"

"Wal?"

"Do ye know thet Stanislaus an' ther Injun hev become pards?"

"No. Is it true?"

"I saw 'em together! An' the Tahoe Infant is dead."

"I didn't think he'd git over thet hangin'," said Faro Phil. "What has become ov Modoc Kate and her young friend?—you know so much, Grizzly?"

"I can't answer that. Ther woman 'll turn up hyer afore long, huntin' for Windy Rube an' the boys what choked ther Infant in ther gulch. I've an idea that she'll shoot promise'ously when she does come."

Grizzly Dick grinned while he spoke the last words.

"She doesn't carry the only droppers in Californy!" growled Faro Phil, as his eyes flashed.

"She must not come hyer for a fuss."

"Mark my words—she'll come. The Infant war her child, yer know."

"So she said."

"Would she hev stood by 'im so ef he warn't?"

"Mebbe not; but even Modoc Kate sometimes got a tight grip on a lie. Yes, let that woman come hyer for vengeance! She's forfeited all claims fer friendship at Bowie Bar. We've sworn since ther gal left thet we'll run this mountain paradise without a seraph."

Grizzly Dick started perceptibly.

"Then Myra's gone, too!" he said.

"Yes; went off last night. Confound the gold camp Cleopatra! let her stay. A gal what would run off with a skunk like Stanislaus, doesn't deserve pectectin'."

"Did she go off with him ag'in?"

"It kinder looks that way."

"Wal, it stumps me!" cried Grizzly Dick. "Let me set eyes on the pair an' I'll separate 'em forever! With Stanislaus? I'm euchered!"

He cast a glance toward the door and took a step forward as he finished the last word.

"This runaway bizness has got ter be stopped, an' I'm ther hustler ter stop it!" he exclaimed.

"While I'm lookin' for that red rustler I'll keep an eye open for Stanislaus an' Flash Dan, an' open also for—"

"Halt!" interrupted Faro Phil, and Grizzly Dick stopped within one step of the open door.

"Thar's some ov us what don't more'n half swaller thet b'ar story."

In an instant the eyes of Grizzly Dick lit up with lightning flashes of madness.

He got dark in the face.

All four of the Blades faced him, Faro Phil a step in the advance, and the right hand of each one clutched the butt of a revolver.

"Don't b'lieve it, eh?" growled Dick. "In other words, I've lied!"

"Take it jist as yer fancy prompts ye," answered Phil, coolly. "Windy Rube's ther most keeful man at Bowie Bar. He'll be ther last galoot ter lose a bowie on the trail. You come hyer with a knife we all know ar' his. Thar's blood on it—b'ar's blood, you say. Prove it. Guide us to ther young grizzly you say you killed. Show us ther cub, Grizzly Dick."

There was almost triumph in the speaker's tones. His words made up a dare that sent hot blood to Grizzly Dick's brain.

"Sartainly, ef you think I lie!" he flung madly into the sport's teeth. "Come with me an' see all ov ther grizzly that ther wolves an' vultures hev spared. For ther first time ther lie has been given me without a deadly return. I owe no man an apology. We're all pards hyer, an' you men ar' ther only livin' beings thet kin dispute ther words ov Grizzly Dick an' live. I've lied hev I—lied in Bowie Bar? Come, ef ye are men ov courage. I'll show ye the car-kiss of ther b'ar whose blood came ter the Bar on Windy Rube's bowie."

With a final look into the eyes of the four pards, Grizzly Dick strode from the saloon.

He was not permitted to proceed a dozen steps alone, for Faro Phil and his companions were at his side and their eyes watched his every movement.

Grizzly Dick did not hesitate more than a moment, but started toward the mountain from whose shadows he had come only a short time before.

He did not look much like a man whose honor had been greatly insulted.

There was a strange gleam in his eyes.

He looked more like the insnarer than the insnarred.

"Wal, my huckleberries, you'll hardly see a grizzly's car-kiss; but you'll look at suthin' livelier afore ye see Bowie Bar ag'in!" under his breath he muttered. "I war a fool fer goin' inter ther saloon with Windy's knife in my belt, but ther scrape I can't git out ov has never been fixed up. A dead grizzly, eh? Thar'll be four dead pards ef my scheme doesn't fail!"

On, on he went deeper into the mountain with Faro Phil and his pards tramping with cocked revolvers at his heels.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A COOL LIAR.

WAITING apparently for some person at the same hour that Grizzly Dick turned his face toward Bowie Bar after his escape from the rope that swung him over the canyon's abyss, stood a fine-looking man at the mouth of a gulch about one mile from the scene of Grizzly's peril.

It was Flash Dan, the Nevada Nabob.

Stars were overhead in myriads, and the walls of the gulch were at his back, and he looked like a statue cut out of rock by expert hands.

We know that he found Mountain Myra's cabin empty, but that he discovered on the table a piece of paper whose contents he would not let Windy Rube see.

He had not yet found the girl whom he called Lonely Jack's child; if the paper had declared her whereabouts, he had not reached them, or, if he had, she was not with him at the mouth of the gulch.

For whom was the Nabob waiting?

"The Injun never deceived me before," he said, in impatient tones, speaking aloud. "He had to go back an' look after the man he says he caught an' hung over the canyon, just as if he's afraid thet rope 'll rot off afore the ruffian dies, or thet the birds ov the air will pull him up ter safety. Thet's what Grizzly Dick gits for taking a bowie what doesn't b'long ter him. Fool with thet Injun pard ov mine, Grizzly, an' you tackle a red rattler."

Flash Dan and the Klamath had met since the former's departure for the gold camp, but the Nabob did not know that Stanislaus Steve had helped the red-skin place Grizzly Dick in the terrible position over the canyon.

This was one of Crested Hawk's little secrets.

All at once the silver sport started forward and looked down the trail that entered the gulch where he stood.

"The red at last!" he murmured, as if confident that Crested Hawk was near at hand.

"We'll not stop till we find Modoc Kate an' Myra. The paper Kate left on the table tells me that Lonely Jack's child is in safe hands. I'm anxious ter compare her with the face in the locket the Injun found among the mountains nigh whar I parted company forever with Jack. I'm goin' ter make thet girl the silver princess ov Nevada. Aha! the— No! not the Injun."

Who had come to the rendezvous instead of Crested Hawk?

Out of the starlight a figure, not at all Indianified, had emerged, and was so near the Nabob that he could touch him with his hands.

Flash Dan looked but for a moment, and then his hand dropped upon the man's shoulder in a manner that seemed to lift him from the ground.

"Perdition! Flash Dan!" was the exclamation.

"Wal, Stanislaus, what ov it?" asked the Nabob, showing his teeth in a smile.

"Nothin', only I warn't expectin' you hyer. Waitin' for some person, ain't yer?"

"What if I am?"

"Thet's none o' my bizness, ov course, Flash Dan. I hev'n't seen you since I knocked Windy Rube out ov Pilgrim Pete's door an' got away afore ther Banded Blades could kiver me. Ho! ho! we have a peck ov trouble—you about findin' Lonely Jack's kid, I with Windy an' his seraphs. No trace ov Myra yet?"

Flash Dan made no reply for a moment.

He stood erect, looking the man before him straight in the eye.

He had gauged Stanislaus Steve before; he knew him for a cool, designing villain who despite his asseverations had not given up schemes against Mountain Myra.

"What if I haven't found the girl, Stanislaus?" said Flash Dan suddenly.

"Oh, it's nothin' ter this chick," said Stanislaus feigning an off-hand manner. "Ov course you b'lieve thet I'd run off with the creature on sight, drag her across two States an' make her my wife, an' all thet at the pistol's muzzle. I'm a full-blown daisy in some matters, Nevada; but I've hed an experience with thet girl which I don't keer ter repeat. No, thank ye, Flash Dan. No runnin' away in mine. Please pass another dish! ho, ho!" And the ruffian-Adonis leaned back with his thumbs in his arm-pits and laughed, much to the silver sport's disgust.

Flash Dan looked at him in a strange manner as if he did not know what to make of such proceedings.

Stanislaus Steve stopped abruptly as if he saw that his hilarity was displeasing to the man he had encountered.

"I've made up my mind to tramp it to Carson," he said. "Whar's ther use ov me tryin' ter stay at Bowie Bar with Windy an' ther pards waitin' ter make a lead mine out ov my anatomy? Thar's more recreation than death at Carson; hyer it's jist t'other way. Hope I won't be molested on the road. Say! ef you'd b'lieve me, Nevada, I'd impart a bit ov information thet might make yer heart glad."

"Wal, what do you know?"

"At this time Myra's back at Bowie Bar."

The sentence drew an exclamation from Flash

Dan's lips; it must have told Stanislaus Steve that his startling information was not credited.

"Myra back thar? Impossible!"

"What did I say?" grinned Stanislaus. "I knew you wouldn't b'lieve me. All right, Nevada. I'll tramp on ter Carson, but not with a lie behind me. Why should I lie ter you about Myra?"

The last sentence was not without an effect. The bronze hand of Flash Dan clutched the handsome sport's arm before he could take a step forward.

"In the gold camp, you say?" said the gold sport, looking him steadily in the eye. "Back among the men tigers ov Bowie Bar?"

"That's about the purport ov my remarks," said Stanislaus coolly. "I've just come from thar. Isn't that proof enough that I don't intend ter disturb the girl any more?"

"Who fetched her back? Modoc Kate?"

"I don't know; she's thar, though. You'll find Myra ef ye want her real bad at Bowie Bar."

"I want her."

"Sartainly! I wanted her once myself, but I've given up thet romance. The Californy pink didn't want me. I'm off for Carson, Nevada. No charge for the information I've given ye. You don't seem ter take it all down. Wal, I can't help thet. Ef an oath'd make it stronger, I'd swear by all thet's holy thet Myra war at ther Bar when I bade it good-by for Carson!"

Flash Dan's hand fell from the young sport's arm, and a step separated the two men.

"Wherever she is, I'll find her," said the Nabob, in low but determined tones.

"Ov course you will, Dan. I admire yer grit, but whar she is ar' also ther knives ov ther Banded Blades!"

An expression of contempt crossed the gold sport's face, but he made no boast.

His eyes told that he feared not the desperadoes who had sworn by the uplifted bowie to stand together through thick and thin.

"You for ther Bar, I guess, me for Carson!" said Stanislaus Steve, stepping back.

"So let it be," was the reply. "No danger shall turn me from Lonely Jack's daughter."

Stanislaus spoke a cheerful good-night as he moved off, watched by Flash Dan until the dense shadows of the gulch hid him from view.

The silver sport did not see Stanislaus Steve halt a few hundred yards away and cock a revolver as he wheeled toward him.

Several cat-like strides bore the younger sport toward the mouth of the gulch, but he halted suddenly and put up the weapon.

"No! let the pards ov Bowie wipe you out, Flash Dan!" he said. "I made you b'lieve the lie you didn't want ter swaller at first. You will go back ter ther Bar on the hunt arter Myra, an' the Blades will riddle ye on sight! I don't exactly know whar Myra is, but I do know thet she's not in the gold camp. Go back, Flash Dan. Ye'r' brave enough ter enter the tigers' den, but not shrewd enough ter git out! Off fer Carson? Wal, hardly, my saint ov the silver hills. I propose ter remain in this vicinity till I win in the game on which I've set my heart!"

Stanislaus Steve went forward toward Carson again.

He left Flash Dan to go to Bowie Bar on the strength of the coolest and most infamous lies ever uttered.

What did the silver sport do?

He tarried for a few minutes at the mouth of the gulch.

Crested Hawk did not come.

Had the Klamath deserted him?

"He kin trail like a bloodhound," suddenly exclaimed the silver sport. "He will follow me an' I won't reach Bowie Bar much ahead ov him. I'd like ter know how Myra got back thar. Modoc Kate must have changed her mind almighty sudden. I guess Stanislaus told the truth. He certainly knows better than ter lie ter Flash Dan."

The Nabob ceased and left his post.

He had resolved to wait no longer for the Indian.

Stanislaus Steve's falsehood had stirred his blood, and sent a lava tide of eagerness through his veins.

Mountain Myra back at Bowie Bar?

He had promised Lonely Jack to find his child, and now that he had struck her trail, he was not the man to be daunted by any danger.

Before he left the gulch, he took a piece of chalk from his pocket and drew a rude hand on a large flat rock near by.

The finger pointed toward the gold camp and the hand was plainly visible in the starlight when he straightened and inspected his work.

That hand was for Crested Hawk when he came.

A moment later he was moving off, and the white hand on the stone was the only thing that told he had been there.

Going back to the tiger's den for a lie!

Thirty minutes later the figure of an Indian appeared on the spot where the silver Nabob had stood.

It was Crested Hawk!

"Flash Dan no wait for Injun," said the red-

skin glancing around and then his eagle eyes saw the white hand on the stone.

He looked at it a moment, then, with a cry of astonishment, bounded away toward the gold camp.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RESCUING A HYENA.

STANISLAUS STEVE had deceived the man from Nevada, and while he was moving toward Carson chuckling over his successful lie, Flash Dan was tramping back toward Bowie Bar.

Stanislaus hoped to get him back there and once more before the revolvers of the Banded Blades; that was the gold dandy's scheme.

He had no notion himself of going to Carson; not while Mountain Myra was near at hand.

He could imagine Flash Dan in the clutches of the gold camp desperadoes.

They had failed to kill him in the mine, but the next time they would not fail.

But something was destined to occur to keep Flash Dan from Bowie Bar for the present, something of a nature novel and startling.

Although Crested Hawk followed the Nabob only thirty minutes after his departure from the mouth of the gulch or canyon, he failed to overtake him.

Flash Dan walked rapidly from the spot, and after awhile entered a canyon which was not on the direct road to Bowie Bar.

It was only a short time after Grizzly Dick let Windy Rube drop from the rope that dangled them both under the log that spanned the mountain gap, and it was this same place that Flash Dan entered.

Something had attracted him into the canyon, for more than once he stopped and listened as if to locate certain sounds.

"It war a man. I'd swear ter it," he murmured during one of these stops. "Mebbe the Injun cut Grizzly Dick loose an' let 'im drop."

Suddenly a voice burst on the Nabob's ear.

"Won't thar be a settlement when I git out ov this?" growled the voice that seemed to come down from above. "Won't I make thet gold camp hustler wish he had Californy between us? By Jehosaphat! I'll make somebody squirm!"

Flash Dan looked up.

Far above the stars twinkled brilliantly and in profusion, but all at once he caught sight of a body of some kind moving a short distance from the wall of the canyon.

Man or beast?

Flash Dan stood on the bed of the big gulch and watched the movements of the strange object with much curiosity.

He could not tell at first whether it was going up or coming down.

"Thar goes my mainstay—ther lasso!" suddenly ejaculated the same voice overhead and in a little while a coil of rope fell at Flash Dan's feet.

"A human, by Jupiter!" cried the silver sport. "What on earth is he doin' up thar?"

This question was not easily answered, and the man wriggling above was still a mystery.

Flash Dan picked up the lasso and examined it in the starlight.

He could make out that it was only a common affair, and coiling it up he presently tossed it aside.

"I don't keer so much about the wound the skunk gave me, ez I do for gittin' out ov hyer," the man overhead suddenly exclaimed. "It's a miracle thet I hit ther tree when he cut me loose. Thar must hev been a Providence in it, but, Providence or not, I'm still in a pickle!"

"Wounded an' helpless up thar?" cried the silver sport, seeming to forget in a moment that he was on his way to the gold camp. "I don't know who that galoot is; I don't care. He's in a fix an' this silver brick ar' goin' ter help him."

He sprang to the wall of the canyon and looked up.

Straight, almost smooth, sides which no living man could scale!

"No goin' up thet way!" he muttered. "I hardly b'lieve a fly could make it. I'll try ther downward drop. Good-by, Bowie Bar, till I've helped ther chap in a fix up thar."

He went to the lasso and picking it up retraced his steps to the mouth of the canyon.

It was hard work sealing the narrow and tortuous path that led to the top, but the Nabob from Silverdom accomplished it without a word.

He made his way along the edge of the canyon with the lasso in his hand and his senses ever on the alert.

Beware, Flash Dan! You are about to succor your bitterest enemy.

At last he reached the tree that spanned the terrible canyon, and in a moment was leaning over the abyss.

"I guess I'd better stay hyer till daylight when I kin take in ther situation," he heard. "By Jupiter! I don't see how I'm goin' ter git away!"

The man who spoke did not seem much lower than the lasso's stretch.

Flash Dan started at the sound, then he crawled out on the log and leaned over the canyon.

He now saw a human figure in what appeared to be a tree-top and quite close to the canyon wall.

"Hello! thar!" he shouted.

The man in the tree uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Hev ye come back?" he sent up to Flash Dan.

"Thet depends. Mebbe I'm not the man ye'r' lookin' for."

"Who ar' you?"

"Flash Dan from Nevada!"

"Oho! I wasn't lookin' for you," was the answer. "However, when a fellar's in a fix he's not particular who helps him out."

"Who ar' you?" asked the Nabob.

"A man in a fix, didn't I just say?" laughed the man in the tree. "I had a lasso awhile ago; but ther blamed thing slid through my fingers an' went ter ther bed ov the canyon."

"Whar I found it."

"Whar?"

"I've got yer lasso."

"Glorious! then drop it down hyer till I kin slip it over my wrist an' you kin help me walk out ov this place."

"That's just what I will do," said the Nabob with a smile.

He lay on the log as he spoke with the black coil of the rope slipping inch by inch through his hands.

He imagined he could see the eager eyes that were watching for it.

The tree-top which had been hurled into the canyon probably by some mountain cyclone and had fastened itself in a great cleft in the wall had miraculously preserved the life of some one—the Nabob did not know who.

"He's not thinkin' ov me!" grinned the man who waited for the noose with burning impatience.

"I'll surprise him nearly as much as I'll shock Grizzly Dick, afore long. Ho! thar's ther rope sure enough!"

The rope was dangling in the starlight, almost within reach of the speaker's hands.

"Can't ye do it a little lower, Dan?" he asked.

"A few inches only, pard."

"Thet'll be enough; six inches will save this mountain hyena."

The requisite amount of rope was furnished, but it taxed the Nabob's reaching powers, and the man in the tree slipped his right wrist into the noose, and waited for Flash Dan to pull.

The sport from Silverdom was a giant in physical strength, but he was not expected to lift in mid-air a person who might be his equal in physique.

He crept back from the log, but not before he had said to the man in the tree:

"I'll do my best for you. You will hev ter help yerself up along the wall."

"I'll do thet, Nevada. Ef I don't want ter be helped ter vengeance, no man ever lived thet did."

Flash Dan began to pull with all his might, and if he could have looked over the edge of the canyon wall, he would have seen that he was not working in vain.

The man below was helping himself up along the wall, while the Nabob pulled, so that both men were doing their level best.

Flash Dan had no idea of the identity of the individual he was helping to safety.

He did not know that only a few hours before he had forced him at the revolver's muzzle to show him Myra's cabin at Bowie Bar, and that he had escaped from the pistols of Faro Phil and his pards by pushing that same man ahead of him from the shanty.

The Nevada Nabob presented a novel sight pulling on the lasso in the starlight, and the man below looked like a gigantic spider creeping up over the canyon wall.

Flash Dan went back as he steadily pulled.

The lasso was unusually long, and he was thirty feet from the edge of the wall when a cry arrested him.

"Hyar I am!" cried the man he had dragged to safety, as his hand caught on the top of the bank. "Now let Grizzly Dick make himself darned scarce!"

Flash Dan threw down the lasso and went forward.

The man was just drawing himself up over the canyon wall, panting like a dog at the end of the chase.

"Hello! Flash Dan! Ye got this mountain daisy up, didn't ye!"

The Nevada Nabob had to stoop to get a good look into the speaker's face.

"Perdition! why didn't you say you war Windy Rube?" he said in tones of disgust.

Windy Rube's answer was a grin and then a boisterous laugh.

"I didn't hev ter, Nevada!" he said. "Sorry ye pulled me up, eh?"

"Yes!" snapped Flash Dan. "I've a mind ter throw ye back!"

"I guess not!" and Windy Rube braced himself while his eyes instantly flashed. "I'm not goin' back thar, Flash Dan—not ter-night at least. I want ter pay Grizzly Dick fer cuttin' me loose, an' I've got several other debts ter settle. Hev ye found Myra?"

"I have not found the girl; but don't trouble

yourself about her. I will! You said awhile ago that you war wounded."

"Winged a little!" laughed Windy Rube opening his shirt and exhibiting a breast covered with blood. "Ther cut bled externally, an' now it's closed. Oh! I'm worth a camp ov dead men! I don't feel as if I war ever stabbed; a strong constitution you know, Nevada."

Flash Dan looked deeply into the face of the gold camp rough.

"I can't help you any longer," he said. "I pulled you out ov one ov the tightest places ov yer life, an' I say plainly, Windy Rube, thet I wish I hadn't heard you squirm in the tree."

"Is thet a fact, Dan?"

"It is, by heavens!"

"Then we don't love one another much?"

"Not at all."

"You've helped me out ov ther pit, but you won't arm me."

"Arm you? Against whom?" cried the Nabob astonished.

"Grizzly Dick ov course."

"No!"

"All right, then! Look out, Flash Dan. You opened the hyena's cage ter-night."

"An' ef I did, I'll kill the beast ef he fools with me!" was the retort.

The Nevada Nabob turned his back to the ruffian with the last word of his reply.

Instantly Windy Rube took a step forward, and then threw himself tigerish at the silver sport.

Flash Dan heard the spring, but had not turned more than half-way ere the man struck him.

He was taken at a great disadvantage, for the arms of Windy Rube encircled him with an embrace he could not shake off.

"Kill ther hyena will yer, Dan?" was hissed at his ear. "Wal, I'll prevent thet by settlin' you!"

Flash Dan saw his peril and struggled.

He had saved his most unrelenting enemy; he saw it now.

With the fury of the animal he impersonated, Windy Rube forced the Silver Nabob toward the edge of the canyon wall.

It was a struggle between two giants.

Flash Dan disputed every inch of ground.

It was the most desperate battle for life he had ever been forced to wage.

"I'm the boss hyena ov these parts!" grated Windy Rube. "I wanted ther pards ter kill yer ther night they lashed yer ter Lonely Jack years ago, but they wouldn't. So I've got ter end yer life-trails myself!"

Windy Rube's left arm bent the Nabob's head back until it threatened to break his neck.

He seemed to feel the tendons give.

"Hold on there!" suddenly rung out a clear voice, like a woman's. "Release that man, or I'll scatter your brains, Captain Rube!"

The gold camp sport looked up.

"Modoc Kate!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FLASH DAN'S FIND.

THE unexpected appearance of the Trigger Queen on the spot when Windy Rube was in the act of throwing the Nevada Nabob over the canyon wall, staggered that desperate worthy beyond all power of description.

In an instant the two men were separate, and Flash Dan recognized his rescuer with looks of astonishment.

She was looking over the barrel of a revolver into Windy Rube's face.

"Yes, I should send you dead down the canyon," she hissed, her eyes glowing like two coals. "I should here avenge the indignity offered the Tahoe Infant; but I withheld my hand because I have sworn to pay all of you at one time! You did not believe me when I told you that the boy was my child; no, villain, you laughed at my assertion; but nevertheless I spoke the truth."

"Hyer! let me settle with the meanest pard ov pards!" said Flash Dan stepping to the woman's side.

"We war settlin' when you chipped in!" flashed Windy Rube glaring at his old antagonist like a tiger. "Stand aside for a spell, Kate, an' we'll show you one ov the prettiest tussles you've seen in many a day."

But Modoc Kate was immovable.

"No!" she said with a swift glance at Flash Dan. "I'll make my word law while I stand here. You men shall not fight in my presence. About face, Captain Rube!"

The boss of Bowie Bar looked defiance but did not move.

"Very well," she continued coolly. "Obey or die! Your life is in your own hands. I don't want your blood now. I have said that I want you and your Banded Blades all together. Which do you choose where you now stand—life or death?"

The words of Modoc Kate were not to be mistaken.

Straight as an arrow, she faced the gold-camp ruffian with the outstretched weapon directed at his head.

Hardly more than five feet separated them.

"Choose, and be quick about it!" she went on,

as sternly as before. "About face, Captain Rube!"

With a final glance at her—a glance which was full of threat and resentment—he turned toward the wooded peak that rose above the canyon.

"Now, forward! I care not where you go! Back to Bowie Bar, to your pards if you will—to the place I shall inhabit no more. Remember that my day of vengeance will come, Captain Rube. The boy I have watched for years, speaking not, you have seen fit to hang at last."

"Why didn't you say so 'thin' afore this?" grated Windy Rube. "Thar warn't a person in ther camp thet dreamed thet ther Infant war yer boy."

A singular smile crossed the woman's face.

"We'll not talk here," she said. "I request, Captain Rube, that you proceed to make yourself scarce."

The rough glanced over one of his broad shoulders at Modoc Kate, but made no reply, and the next moment was walking away.

It did not take more than a minute to cause him to vanish from sight.

"Thet's more than I'd hev done," said Flash Dan to the Trigger Queen. "I'd hev crushed ther mountain serpent as I'd crush a genuine rattler, but you let him git clear off."

"Yes, I let him go," smiled Modoc Kate. "It is enough for me to reach you in time to render you a service. The mountain serpent had you in his coils when I came."

"Jumped on my back like a panther, an' thet when I hed pulled him out ov ther jaws ov death! Talk about gratitude, Modoc Kate! why thet gold devil doesn't know it from revenge; 'pon honor he doesn't."

"And he will never learn the difference. Well, I sha'n't attempt to teach him, Flash Dan."

"When I find him again I'll skin the snake an' hang ther carkiss in ther sun. But thet'd interfere with what you intend ter do with 'im, eh, girl?"

"Somewhat," laughed Modoc Kate. "I have a right, a terrible right, to strike the Banded Blades of Bowie Bar, but I don't like to transform myself into a vengeance-hunter. My blood grows hot when I think that my boy was strangled by that set of mountain wolves."

Flash Dan looked down into the woman's face for a moment, but did not speak.

He saw fire in the depths of her eyes.

"You want to find, Myra," she continued, her voice no longer harsh and revengeful.

"Yes!" cried Flash Dan, starting. "I want to find Lonely Jack's daughter. I promised the disconsolate man whom I left sick in the mountains years ago thet I would take up his trail—thet I would find his stolen girl an' make somebody ov her ter ther best ov my ability."

"Very well. And I am glad to say that I can show you the girl."

"To-night?"

"To-night!"

"Glory halleluyer!" ejaculated the Nevada Nabob. "I found ther writin' on her table at ther Bar whar you left it, eh?"

"I left it there. I tried to word it in a manner that would tell you only, if you did happen to find it, that Myra had gone off with me."

"I didn't let Windy Rube see it, though he wanted ter bad. An' you will show me Mountain Myra to-night?"

"Within an hour."

"Ah! thet's worth livin' for!" exclaimed the silver sport. "After I hev found the girl I'll proceed ter a little bizness ov my own. Them cusses banished Lonely Jack an' I from Nugget City five year ago. They call themselves ther Banded Blades now—their six ov 'em."

"No, five," said Modoc Kate, significantly.

"Whar's ther sixth galoot?"

"Where like a fool he went to sleep instead of going back to his master who sent him to remove the Tahoe Infant before I got to the spot where Captain Rube shot him down. That sixth man, Solid Saul, will swear by the naked blade no more."

"Wal, five, then," said Flash Dan.

"But I want ter see the girl for whom Lonely Jack hunted."

"We'll go to her then," and with a glance at the Nevada Nabob Modoc Kate started off.

Of course the man who kept at her side was the cool man from the silver lands.

Eagerness beamed from his eyes as he moved along, his whole trust in the woman who had promised to lead him to Mountain Myra.

"Did you come down this gulch?" suddenly asked Flash Dan, as he touched the Trigger Queen's arm at the mouth of a gulch with high dark walls.

"Yes."

"Did you see Stanislaus?"

"No. Was he here?"

"Yes, hero he lied to me," said the Nabob.

"Hyer, while I waited for Crested Hawk awhile ago, he came along an' told me thet Myra war back in the gold camp an' actually sent me toward it."

"And Stanislaus?" questioned the woman, eagerly.

"He tramped toward Carson; said he war goin' ther."

"Do you believe that, Flash Dan?" exclaimed Modoc Kate. "He lied once you say; why not twice?"

"I didn't think his first play war a lie. Now I see. I stood hyer an' allowed thet rustler ter fool me."

"Yes, and what is more, Stanislaus Steve will never go to Carson City while Myra is in this part of the country. I did not meet him, but if he went the whole length of this gulch he may have made a discovery which I shall regret."

Modoc Kate started away again with the more than eager sport once more at her side.

What if Stanislaus Steve had found the girl again?

Five minutes later the Trigger Queen paused abruptly, and turned apparently toward a solid stone wall.

"We shall see in a moment," she said.

Flash Dan who knew that the gulches of the Sierra are in many places honeycombed with caverns of different sizes, was not astonished to see Modoc Kate disappear where the wall seemed solid, and he did not hesitate to follow her.

In a moment he found himself in a corridor the top of which he could not reach by stretching his hands above his head.

The woman was some distance ahead of him, but the darkness rendered her figure invisible.

Presently he heard Modoc Kate's voice, and in reply to it another that sent a nameless thrill to his heart.

"Lonely Jack's kid at last!" exclaimed Flash Dan. "Strike a light, Modoc Kate, an' let me set my eyes on ther daisy one."

A very little time sufficed to procure a light, and in its glare the man from Nevada saw a girlish figure bound toward his conductor.

At sight of Flash Dan the beautiful young girl paused and started back.

At the same time she shot a quick questioning glance at the Trigger Queen.

"I see you plainly, Myra!" and Flash Dan snatched the burning lucifer from Modoc Kate's hand and went eagerly toward the girl. "I've got the image of your face in gold. Look at this!—the locket Crested Hawk stumbled on in the mountains!"

Gazing alternately at Flash Dan and at the locket which he was extending, Mountain Myra stood her ground and allowed him to come up.

"Didn't I tell Lonely Jack that I'd find you some day?" he laughed, while the girl surveyed her own portrait in its frame of gold. "The moment the Injun told me thet the livin' counterpart ov ther picture war at Bowie Bar, I knowed I hed yer. Now I kin go back an' settle with the banded galoots who tied me ter yer father, girl, an' sent us, outlaws, from Nugget City. Now I kin face the Banded Blades on their own ground!"

The last word had scarcely left the Nabob's lips when a loud voice made all parties turn toward the corridor.

"Throw up yer hands, Flash Dan, an' look death in the face! Fortune in an unexpected manner has re-armed the gold-camp hyena!"

The speaker was seen in an instant.

He stood only fifteen feet away, tall, erect, with a repeating rifle at his shoulder.

Mountain Myra uttered a cry.

The man was Windy Rube!

CHAPTER XXX.

THREE OF A KIND.

A STARTLING silence followed the speech of the gold-camp sport.

Flash Dan was in the power of a man whose favorite boast was that he had never been suckled at the breast of mercy.

Windy Rube's cheek had dropped to a level with the repeating rifle, and the Nevada Nabob had to look into the weapon's muzzle.

"Ain't yer hands goin' up, Nevada?" cried the Blade impatient and in a voice that seemed to tremble with rage.

"Not for you!" cried Mountain Myra to the surprise of all who heard her. "While I can prevent, the hands of Flash Dan of Nevada shall never go up at the command of the brute of Bowie Bar!"

Before the young girl had finished, she had planted herself firmly in front of Flash Dan, and her black eyes were flashing fire at Captain Rube.

"Now, if you dare!" she went on. "If fortune has armed you in an unexpected manner, as you say, you shall not carry out your mean revenge."

Windy Rube looked amazed.

It was a tableau for which he had not bargained.

"About face and march!" said Modoc Kate. "Remember that but awhile ago I spared your life when I had it at the muzzle of my revolver. Go, Captain Rube. Flash Dan throws not up his hands where he stands."

The man with the rifle looked nonplused and baffled.

He had been beaten in less than a minute.

"I never thought Flash Dan would let a girl shield him!" he said sarcastically with a look at the silver sport. "I'll go an' make his courage the laughing stock ov Bowie Bar. All right, Modoc Kate, I turn my back on ye all, but I

hope soon ter see yer under other sarcumstances. Good-night, my three sports. Ah! you recognize my rifle, girl."

"Yes," cried Myra. "It belonged to Nugget Ned, our boy friend, at sundown. Where is he?"

"Somewhar among ther mountains!" laughed Rube. "I'm sorry I hev'n't time ter explain. When we meet ag'in, mebbe I'll enlighten ye about ther cub's misfortune."

He turned his back on the trio, and was gone before Flash Dan could step forward with cocked revolver.

"No," said Myra, laying a hand on the Nabob's arm. "Let him go. If you are going to Bowie Bar, you will meet him there. But the boy—Nugget Ned? The rifle Windy Rube carried belonged to him."

"That's what I war goin' ter shoot out ov him—the young pard's wharabouts," was the answer; but it was no use—Captain Rube had already left the cavern.

It was not until the next day, after sundown, that the boss of Bowie Bar reappeared in the gold camp.

"I'm back at head-quarters once more, an' when I git ther boys together I'll proceed ter make things lively," he said to the few miners who met him shortly after his entrance into the gold camp.

Windy Rube stood before them with eyes that flashed madness from their depths.

"Whar's ther pards?" he suddenly asked.

"They went with Grizzly Dick from camp a while ago."

"Grizzly Dick?" echoed the Blade. "Arter what he did ter me, had he ther audacity ter show his face hyer?"

"He came an' met ther pards playin' cards at ther Smilin' Corpse. They hed words over a knife that he carried in his belt."

"It war my knifel!" broke in Windy Rube.

"That's what Faro Phil said, I believe. Grizzly Dick didn't deny it, but said he found it in ther mountains, an' he swore thet ther blood on it war thet ov a young grizzly. Arter thet, with Grizzly guarded, they all left camp."

"Grizzly Dick war goin' ter show 'em ther b'ar, I suppose," sneered Windy Rube. "Which train did they take?"

"Ther main one."

"An' they've been gone—"

"About two hours."

Windy Rube said nothing, but looked toward the trail which led from the camp and apparently lost itself among the mountains.

"Thar's no b'ar for Grizzly Dick ter show 'em," he said, suddenly. "The blood on thet bowie war my blood. Grizzly cut me while we war on the rope swingin' over a canyon, an' I hed ter drop. I'm hyer because Flash Dan, the Nevada skunk, pulled me out ov ther pit. Flash Dan, boys, ther galoot ov lots ov silver an' many lives. Went down ther Carson trail ter find thet b'ar, eh?" and Windy Rube looked toward the mountain again. "Grizzly hed ter meet ther charge in some way, so he offered ter show 'em what he knew didn't exist—the young grizzly thet bloodied my knife. Confound ther liar's pictur'! I'll find him afore mornin', an' show him thet ther real grizzly still lives!"

Windy Rube started toward the edge of the gold camp.

He looked the picture of rage and vengeance.

"I'm goin' ter add fresh blood ter thet on the bowie Grizzly Dick carries!" the miners heard him hiss. "No man lives long ter boast that he has spilled the lifstide ov Windy Rube. I've been rather unfortunate ov late. Knocked down by Stanislaus Steve an' knifed by Grizzly Dick; then, baffled by two women ter end ther programme. It's too much! I must begin ter play ther hand thet wins. My only victory has been over a boy whose rifle I got by strategy, an' who I left helpless in the mountains. Let me find Grizzly Dick an' all my enemies! Bowie Bar is goin' ter come out on top in this game! Flash Dan may play the Nabob in Nevada, but on this side ov ther line, he will fail."

Windy Rube had reached the last cabins of the gold camp when he halted suddenly and quickly laid his hand on the revolver he carried.

"What'll Rube say ter this lay-out?" said a voice, the sound of which sent the boss of Bowie Bar forward with an ejaculation.

"If he lives, ye should say, Faro," was the response. "Few men live an' hev good health arter fallin' down ther kind ov canyon Grizzly Dick harped about. An' we let him git away, too."

"Let Grizzly Dick escape?" roared Windy Rube, as he halted before two men who had just emerged from the shadows of the mountain road. "Wal, you left him for me, then!"

The pair halted and at sight of Captain Rube fell back with looks of astonishment.

"What did he do, Faro?" continued Rube. "Did he show you the grizzly that bloodied his blade?"

"No; thar war no b'ar in the case. It war a lie out ov whole cloth—a device ter get to ther mountains thet he might hev a chance ter shoot."

Windy Rube's face grew almost black under a scowl.

"Ter shoot!—who?" he cried.

"Two out ov four," was the answer. "He let Quartz Rock an' Sudden Sam hev it afore we could lift a hand."

"Tell me!"

Windy Rube folded his arms and looked into the faces of the men that faced him.

"Wal, he came ter camp just afore sundown with yer bowie," began Faro Phil, when he was stopped by an impatient gesture.

"I know what happened up ter ther time ye marched 'im out ov camp ter find ther young b'ar," said Windy Rube. "Yer kin begin further down ther line, Faro."

"All right; I'll get ter ther end sooner. I didn't take much stock in the b'ar story myself, but he stuck ter it like a postage-stamp. We marched him just whar he wanted to go. It war three miles from hyer. All at once he stopped at a point whar ther trail struck a deep-walled gulch an' whar the shadows war uncommon thick. It war thar, he said, thet he met an' wiped out ther b'ar. 'Whar's yer carkiss?' asked Sudden Sam. He p'inted ter a lot ov bushes at ther foot ov ther wall. 'You chaps hev thought I war lyin' all ther time,' he went on. 'Go forward an' see the grizzly thet reddened Cap'n Rube's bowie.' I watched ther mountain galoot, but Sudden Sam went ter look for the grizzly thet war never thar. All ov a sudden Grizzly Dick jumped back with a laugh, an' at ther same time his revolver cracked an' Sam dropped inter the bushes! It war done in less time than thet." And Faro Phil snapped his fingers.

"Sam war only one," remarked Windy Rube.

"Yes," continued Faro. "But he had hardly hit ther bushes ere Grizzly sent a bullet through Quartz Rock's head an' tumbled him ag'in me before I could open on him. Arter thet he didn't shoot any more, for Big Bart, my pard, fired ez he turned an' sent him yellin' down ther trail. Out ov sight he stopped, an' told us how he gave you the knife an' sent you headlong from a lasso thet hung over a certain canyon. I went arter him, but he warn't ter be wiped out; an' hyar we ar' two, when four walked out ov Bowie Bar, fooled by a villain an' his lie."

Faro Phil evidently expected an outburst of mad displeasure from the man who faced him with folded arms, but he was disappointed.

"I don't blame you, pards," said Windy Rube without a show of anger against the men who had followed his fortunes for years through thick and thin. "The league ov ther Bowie Blades is half wiped out. We've not got ter ther end ov ther game yet. Let me tell you: Flash Dan will come back to Bowie Bar. I know it. This time Mountain Myra will not bring him hither for he has found her. He will come because we lashed him ter Lonely Jack five years ago in ther Shasta kentry an' sent him friendless ter ther mountains. Yes. Vengeance will bring him back, an' his red pard will come, too. Then, the woman who lived with us month arter month watchin' ov ther kid she calls her boy, hes sworn thet she will deal with ther Banded Blades collectively for ther hangin' in ther gulch t'other night. Added ter these enemies, we hev also Stanislaus Steve an' Grizzly Dick ter hate an' ter kill. What shall we do? Shall the league organized under the shadows ov Shasta recruit its ranks at Bowie Bar an' meet the enemy thus, or shall what is left ov it die, of die it must, with six revolvers in as many hands? For one, I'm ag'in reorganization. By the soul ov Satan! Windy Rube an' his two pards kin yet whip the wolves ov vengeance. Stand by yer cap'n, boys, an' thar'll be some ov ther tallest work this gold land ever saw!"

In an instant the hands of Faro Phil and Big Bart had sought the bronze fingers of Windy Rube.

"No recruitin', cap'n!" said Faro with the coolness of the true desperado. "We'll hold this mountain fort ag'in 'em all! Welcome Flash Dan, welcome Modoc Kate—welcome all who want our blood ter Bowie Bar. Three cheers for ther three Blades whose points are yet unbroken! Solid Saul, Quartz Rock an' Sudden Sam ar' behind us. Before us from ter-night lies victory or death."

The speaker ceased and stepping back jerked off his sombrero and sent it spinning toward the stars while he awoke the echoes of the gorge with a shout of defiance.

"Back ter camp now," said Windy Rube. "No man will be asked to join our ranks. I counted on yer, boys. I knew thet three would walk down ter ther end ov ther game with blood on their boots!"

The trio went back to the gold camp.

Shoulder to shoulder the determined pards walked among the shanties, their eyes showing that they were eager for the enemy to come.

"Three left, eh?" muttered a human being whose back touched one of the cabins, while his eyes watched the gold camp pards. "The man who stole Crested Hawk's knife will come hyer no more. Flash Dan is not hyer, but the hand on the stone told the Klamath that he would come. Crested Hawk will wait for him."

Yes, the speaker was the cool Klamath, Flash Dan's Indian pard, and having watched the last of the Blades out of sight, he glided away.

The three pards separated soon afterward, and Windy Rube went to his own shanty, where he lit a candle and dressed the cut Grizzly Dick had inflicted over the canyon.

Then he cleaned his weapons, and carefully loaded them.

"We war sort ov friends once, Flash Dan, but now—enemies eternal!" he suddenly hissed. "I shall stay hyer an' win Bowie Bar's battle. Then, with you an' the Trigger Queer out ov my way, I'll yet make Mountain Myra queen ov ther gold camp."

Five minutes later Faro Phil poked his head into the room.

Excitement lit up his dark eyes.

"Wal, what's up, Faro?" cried Captain Rube.

"Ther advance guard bez come. Ther red choker is hyer!" was the reply.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ADVANCE GUARD STRIKES.

THE truth of the matter was that Crested Hawk had not left Bowie Bar.

Faro Phil had merely discovered him; that was all, and in conveying his discovery to Windy Rube, he had called the Klamath the advance guard.

Armed to the teeth and eager to send a bullet through the Indian's head, the boss ruffian of Bowie Bar stepped from the cabin and demanded to be led to where the red pard was.

"Hedn't we better watch him for awhile?" queried Faro. "He may be playin' spy, an' by keepin' our peepers on 'im we may git ter corral Flash Dan."

"No! we'll bullet 'em as they come," persisted the gold sport. "It may be best ter take 'em one at a time. Show me the red thet chocked Grizzly Dick fer a joke."

Faro Phil knew where he had last seen the red-skin, standing like a statue near one of the cabins next to the mountains.

He had watched him till he knew he could not be mistaken; the man was Crested Hawk, Flash Dan's pard.

"He's standin' thar yet like a board; I'll bet my boots on it," he said to Windy Rube whom he hurried off. "If we could lasso ther Greaser—"

"No chances, Faro," was the swift interruption, and Windy Rube's finger toyed impatiently with the trigger of his revolver. "By Jupiter! I'm goin' ter take none from now on—not a single one. You'll see thet red hustler leap inter ther air with a yell ther moment I set eyes on 'im!"

Knowing the man at his side by years of association, Faro Phil offered no more suggestions, but looked half regretfully at Windy Rube as they walked along.

"Why didn't I lasso the copper snake?" he murmured. "It'll be a dead drop with no fun at all. When the pistol awakens the boys the fun 'll be over, an' with nuthin' but a dead Injun ter show fer it all."

The expedition of two was not long in reaching a certain spot.

An unusually brilliant display of stars enabled the two desperadoes to see objects some distance away with wonderful distinctness.

The night was clear and still, and Bowie Bar seemed to be enjoying the slumber of the just.

"He war yonder," said Faro Phil pointing toward a certain shanty which had once been Mountain Myra's humble abode. "When I left him he war standin' thar almost ag'in' ther tree thet touches ther cave—standin' straight, like a board."

Windy Rube leaned forward and gazed over Faro Phil's outstretched hand with a fighting man's eagerness.

But he saw nothing.

If Crested Hawk had been there a few minutes before, it was certain that he was not there now.

Faro Phil, too, was disappointed.

What had become of the wily Indian?

He had watched him so long that he had almost come to the conclusion that the red-skin had taken up a position for the night, and he had fetched his leader, Windy Rube, to the place to find it vacant.

For several minutes the giant ruffians stood where they had first halted, and stared at the spot where Faro Phil had seen the red-man.

"He's moved his post," said Phil at last. "Confound him! he's the advance guard an' Flash Dan's spy!"

"I wish I knew it," murmured Windy Rube. "I'm sartain ov it," said Phil, with positiveness. "I'll stake my teeth thet afore day we'll hev another visitor."

"Flash Dan?"

"Yes, the silver Nabob. He's sent his Injun ahead ter spy out ther land, thet's all."

"Whar's Big Bart?"

"In his shanty, I guess. I didn't stir him out."

"Go an' do it, then. We'll meet 'em with our hull force when they git hyer. I'll meet you an' Bart under ther tree yonder. Remember, thet this may be ther Banded Blades' last fight for supremacy."

Faro Phil glanced at his master and hurried off.

"I'd give my fortune in dust ter see thet

sneakin' red-skin while Faro's gone," said Windy Rube, speaking aloud to himself when he found himself alone. "Ov course Faro saw him under ther tree, but he hed ter move off afore I got my eyes on him. Before I came, ther panther hunted another spot."

A few minutes longer Windy Rube continued to occupy the same spot when he moved toward the tree and took up a new position near it but against Myra's cabin, which one of his broad shoulders touched.

Here he waited for Faro Phil and Big Bart who, with himself, were the last of the famous Banded Blades of Bowie Bar.

The starlight that was showered upon the giant tough of the gold camp was strong enough to have revealed him to keen eyes from a goodly distance, and in it his stalwart figure seemed to assume still more gigantic proportions.

He and his worthies had led a dual life at the Bar for almost five years.

They mined at times with the men who were constantly wresting gold from the hills, but they were always desperadoes ready to fight at the drop of the hat, and at all times willing to decide the slightest dispute with bowie or revolver.

But now the league which had ruled in scores of fierce combats instead of being six men, had been reduced to three; but the trio was a trio of veritable man tigers.

Windy Rube seemed to be recalling the wild past of the Banded Blades while he waited for Faro Phil's return between tree and cabin, and in the soft starlight of the autumn night.

Nothing disturbed him, not even the door that opened a few feet away—opened just two inches; but enough to let the stars see a pair of eyes that blazed with eagerness like two living coals.

If Windy Rube had looked over his shoulder with one-half of his usual precision, he would have started toward the door with weapon fully drawn.

After awhile the door opened a little more, and displayed a dark face and the two blazing eyes again.

It was evident that those very eyes had marked Windy Rube's position, nay, more—that their owner had recognized him.

"It takes Faro a long time ter stir Bart out!" suddenly exclaimed the gold sport as his impatience got the better of him. "I could hev roused a thousand men. Curse Faro's slowness!"

The foot of the owner of the pantherish tread was outside the door now.

It was clothed in a fancifully wrought moccasin and above it was a fringed leather legging.

With a cat-like step the Indian—for Indian it was—advanced upon Windy Rube.

Hardly five feet separated them, and yet not a sound to rouse the rough.

The form of the red threw no shadow on the ground.

When he paused he could have laid his scarlet hand on Windy Rube's shoulder.

He stood almost erect and eyed the boss of Bowie Bar with the look the tiger gives its victim just before its crushing spring.

He scrutinized Windy Rube from head to foot as if he were calculating the ruffian's strength.

Of course the Indian was Crested Hawk.

The silver-handled bowie that protruded above the leathern sheath in his belt established his identity beyond question.

With Windy Rube before him he had but to whip out the famous weapon and drive it downward through flesh and muscle to the heart.

But Crested Hawk stood immovable and eyed the ruffian with singular curiosity.

He had lately burred this same man from a log that bridged a canyon, and now he stood in the starlight apparently unhurt.

Under such circumstances Crested Hawk had a right to be amazed.

He seemed to be conjecturing what strange power had rescued the gold-camp desperado.

Of course he did not stand there long.

All at once one of his red hands went up, and the next moment it dropped like a trip-hammer on Windy Rube's shoulder.

It clutched as it struck.

"Jehosaphat! who did that?" cried the man of Bowie Bar as he wheeled at the first touch, and then the first look at the Indian drove his hand toward his belt.

"Crested Hawk touches the gold eagle," said the Indian.

"So I see! Darn ye! we war lookin' fer ye awhile ago; but—"

"Cap'n Rube find the Klamath, eh?" grinned the red. "He may hear the cricket leap from leaf to leaf, but he did not hear Crested Hawk come up."

"I warn't thinkin' ov you!" blurted Windy Rube. "But since we've met, we'll just settle an old account."

He jerked back with all his strength, and mad, as he shot out the last word.

He pulled the Klamath with him, but despite his display of strength he did not shake the Indian's hold.

"You're but ther advance guard—we know it!" he grated. "Whip out yer silver bowie an' fight Captain Rube like a man!"

The response was an epithet in the Klamath tongue, and then the right fist of the Indian dealt a blow which a cat could neither have seen nor avoided.

He struck with seemingly no effort at all, yet Windy Rube received the blow full in the face and went backward.

He fell against the tree and sunk slowly at its roots watched narrowly by the silver Nabob's pard.

"Crested Hawk could kill, but he waits for Flash Dan," said the red-skin. "He had to do something for Captain Rube stood too close to the house that the Klamath hid in. When Flash Dan comes to strike the gold panther will drop again."

With another glance at the rough who had apparently been knocked senseless, he glided away as noiseless as he had crept upon his victim.

Several minutes later Faro Phil and Big Bart reached the spot, and Windy Rube was shaken back into consciousness.

"Julius Caesar! what hez happened?" cried Phil.

Windy Rube ground his teeth till they cracked.

"Slugged by thet red Satan!" he growled.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TOSS OF A COIN.

THE three Banded Blades watched the night through with weapons within easy reach, and ready for the enemy.

The stars went down and the fresh winds ushered in another day.

Windy Rube's discolored face was the only thing that told of Crested Hawk's visit to Bowie Bar.

He still cursed the red pard, and vowed that he would have his blood for the blow.

"They won't come in the daytime," the gold sport said to his companions. "They'll come like thieves in the night, expectin' ter find us off our guard. Let 'em try thet sneak game. I don't keer whether they all jump us at once or one at a time. Our droppers'll make the result the same. By Jehu! we'll add ter ther graveyard on ther mountain-side!"

The men who mined the hills went to their daily toil deep down in the mountains, and once more Bowie Bar was left to the remnant of the band which had given more than one gold camp a wild and unsavory reputation.

The sun came up, reached the zenith in unclouded splendor, and drooped toward the western horizon again.

Windy Rube looked toward the mountains and muttered.

The enemies of Bowie Bar had not come.

"Pshaw! they've turned tail an' gone back!" he said. "Arter all, I guess we'll hev ter hunt Flash Dan among ther monte banks ov Nevada. He's satisfied with hev'in' found the girl, an' Modoc Kate's concluded ter unite her future fortunes with his."

Windy Rube stood while he spoke where he had stood before—at the bar once presided over by Pilgrim Pete, but now attended to by a fit successor to the man who had tracked the merciless Klamath too far.

He was not alone, for the two men who had scarcely left his side since the knock-down of the previous night, had just drank at his expense.

"Say the word, an' ter the monte banks we go," said Big Bart, looking at Windy Rube. "They won't come hyer ter us; we kin go ter them. Whar we find Flash Dan, thar we'll find his infernal Injun."

Windy Rube looked at Faro Phil.

"Which shall it be, Faro—go or stay?" he said.

"I'm not partic'lar; you're the captain," was the response.

The gold sport stepped back and took an eagle from his pocket.

"We'll toss for the decision," he continued, addressing Faro Phil. "Up goes ther gold, Faro. Heads, we wait for Flash Dan hyer; tails, we hunt him!"

The next moment the piece of yellow coin went spinning toward the ceiling, watched eagerly by the three bronzed pard.

It struck the rafters above with a clear metallic ring, and came back to the hard floor in a jiffy.

"What is it?" cried Big Bart, leaning forward, with excitement in his eyes. "Shall we go or stay?"

"We fight 'im hyer," said Windy Rube, for the goddess on the face of the coin was looking as it were into his dark face.

"Mebbe he won't come," answered Big Bart, displeased. "Give the goddess another toss. Tails it must be this time."

Windy Rube, with a smile, stooped and picked up the coin which he balanced on his fingers.

"Hyar it goes ag'in!" he exclaimed, and the gold eagle went up the second time.

All watched the descent with the same interest and leaned forward with eagerness to note the result.

"Heads ag'in!" growled Faro Phil and Big Bart in chorus. "Thar's some infernal charm in this. Ther third time'll break it, p'raps."

"Try it, Bart," said Windy Rube.

Big Bart was only too eager to try his luck with the coin, and he snatched it from the floor and straightened himself.

"This time for tails!" he cried, and the piece shot toward the rafters with more force than Captain Rube had put in either throw.

"Damn me, ef it isn't haunted!" exclaimed Windy Rube, as the money hit the floor again and rolled to his feet. "Heads it is, by thunder! Boys, thet's fate!"

The two pards looked at the coin with lowering glances, as if they could have destroyed it with glee for its perverseness.

"Confound it! let's go, anyhow!" snapped Big Bart. "Thet piece ov gold ar' workin' for Flash Dan. Ef he war comin' ter Bowie Bar, he'd have been hyer afore this. We've got ter hunt ther galoot ef we want ter find him an' his copper pard. Ter Carson City! Thet's my ticket!"

Windy Rube seemed undecided.

He looked at the gold-piece still lying at the toe of his heavy boot, and seemed to be consulting it in silence.

He thought it strange that it should fall three times heads in succession, and that, despite the efforts of the throwers to make it land with the other side up.

"Take a drink, an then for Flash Dan's trail!" exclaimed Bart, moving toward the counter. "Damn the traitor eagle, anyhow, I say. Waltz up, pards, an' nominate yer liquid j'ison."

Windy Rube picked up his money, gave it a mad look and sent it down into his pocket with an unspoken oath.

"We'll tap the monte banks an' Flash Dan's blood reservoir, too!" said Big Bart, who was leaning over the counter waiting for his order to be filled.

His black eyes glistened like polished ebony, and he meant every word he said.

"I don't like ther way thet gold piece acted," said Windy Rube, as he reached his pard's side.

In an instant Big Bart was looking into his face.

"Ar' ye afraid ter luck ag'in' it, Windy?" he exclaimed, in tones full of derision. "Because it said stay, would ye rayther stay than go?"

"It means suthin'," was the answer. "You know, Bart, thet you tried ter make it fall tails up ther time you tossed?"

"Yes."

"So did I ther second time I threw it up."

"Wal?"

"It would come heads in spite ov us."

"Which means, I suppose—"

"Thet we'd better obey it an' remain hyer."

Big Bart's countenance fell but his eyes still flashed.

"Jes' ez ye say, Windy," he said in no pleasant tone. "Ef ye think thet blamed eagle knows what's what, it's stay instead ov go. But my private 'pinion publicly expressed is thet we'll find no fightin' hyer. Throw up ther gold piece ag'in just ez a clincher."

Windy Rube dived into the depths of his pocket and once more sent the shining eagle above his head.

Silence followed till it struck the floor.

"Hang me! ef I ain't stumped!" grated Big Bart. "Heads it is ag'in, an' thet says 'stay an' find no fight hyer! Wal, stay it is, cap'n; but I'm goin ter limit ther time ez far ez I'm consarned. Gulp down yer red ruin, pards, an' let's git away from hyar. Since Pilgrim Pete left, the place seems haunted."

The three pards swallowed their whisky in silence, and Big Bart was about to pay the score when Windy Rube threw the perverse coin upon the counter.

"Transfer thet stubborn piece ov gold ter yer bank," he said to the man who had taken Pilgrim Pete's place behind the counter. "No change, Sandy. I'm glad to git rid ov thet spiteful piece thet keeps us hyer by some mysterious spell."

The alacrity with which the genius behind the bar pounced upon the gold piece told that he feared no spells it might weave in the future, and it was speedily transferred to his pockets.

Windy Rube turned toward the door as the transfer was made.

"What if nobody comes fer two days?" asked Big Bart. "Shall we consult thet infernal gold piece ag'in?"

"Not thet one. We'll try a better," was the reply.

"Very well, but I give notice hyer an' now, thet hyerafter I decide for myself," flashed Bart. "No dumb judges fer me! Stay hyer an' rot! Flash Dan will never come!"

He said the last words in tones that did not get beyond the heavy mustache that drooped over his mouth.

Of all the Banded Blades, Big Bart was perhaps the most desperate when stirred up.

He always chafed under restraint, and did not like to acknowledge any will but his own.

Windy Rube looked at him while he spoke last and stopped within five feet of the door which was open and admitted the last beams of the declining sun.

"Look hyer, Bart; if you want ter hunt Flash Dan you know ther trail ter Carson," he said.

Big Bart looked surprised. "Do you mean that you'd not go along?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I'm goin' ter see what thet gold piece means by turnin' heads in spite ov us. Thar's suthin' in it. But ef you want ter go, thar's ther trail."

"No; I stay, too," was the answer.

"But for two days only; mind thet."

"I agree—for two days be it," said Windy Rube. "Ef, thar's a spell in the money it'll work itself out afore thet time."

"Mebbe ter-night," suggested Faro Phil.

"By Jupiter! I hope so!" ejaculated Big Bart. "I want somebody ter come an' thet blamed soon. I don't keer what he calls himself—Crested Hawk, Flash Dan, er ther devil!"

"Neither do I, so he comes."

The three worthies walked from the saloon watched by the man who presided over the counter.

The sun went down and the barkeeper was trimming his lamp for his nightly guests when a man strode into the place and walked straight to the counter.

"Hustle around an' give me yer best!" the visitor said.

Sandy turned to him with an exclamation of surprise.

"Great buzzsaws! what fetched you back?" he cried.

"Come ter attend ther picnic," was the answer as the speaker, with a glance at the door poured out his liquor. "Didn't ther three galoots just vamose this paradise? I thought so. But tell me one thing. How did Windy Rube git out ov Grimdeath Canyon alive?"

"I never heard him say," said the bartender. "In fact, I didn't know he hed any serious adventures there."

"I should smile. Why, darn his skin, I cut him loose from my own carkiss an' saw him drop. Thet canyon's a thousand feet deep more er less, Sandy, an' yet hyer's Windy Rube ez big ez life. Yes, I'm hyer ter see ther picnic."

"What picnic? I don't understand."

"Ther one Flash Dan an' company ar' bringin' with 'em."

"Ar' they on their way ter Bowie Bar?" cried the whisky-seller.

"I should gently remark, Sandy. I shouldn't be surprised ef they war hyer now."

"Then it's my duty ter post ther three Blades."

"I guess not!" and the hand of Grizzly Dick crossed the counter and alighted on the barkeeper's shoulder. "You don't do anything ov ther kind, my seraph ov ther decanter. We're all goin' ter meet on equal ground hyer, an' nobody shall be warned."

"All right, then," said Sandy, mellowing quietly before the flashes of Grizzly Dick's eyes. "Thet gold piece didn't show up heads every time for nothin'."

"What gold piece?"

"Why, the one Windy Rube tossed up awhile ago ter see whether they should hold ther fort er advance. It kept 'em hyer."

Grizzly Dick showed his teeth with a grin.

"Windy an' his pards'd drop me on sight, ov course," he said. "An' so would Flash Dan. But you kin chalk on yer slate, Sandy, thet arter the tussle I'll be one ov ther survivors! By Jehosaphat! I'm a rattlin' rustler from Stir'em-up Gulch, and under ther circumstances I'm one ov ther few livin' men who'd show up hyer at this time; an' don't you overlook it!" And Grizzly Dick's bronzed hand came down with thundering emphasis on the counter.

A moment later the fearless sport turned on his heel and was walking off, leaving the liquor-vender to gaze after him with dilated eyes.

"So they're comin', eh?" he ejaculated. "Thet includes the red cyclone thet passed through this shanty when Pilgrim Pete held sway hyer. I guess I'd better prepare for ther storm."

Sandy followed his remarks by prompt action, and a few minutes later the greater part of his stock in trade had been concealed beneath a trap-door in the floor.

Then he leaned on the counter, and with a revolver within reach, waited for the tempest which Grizzly Dick had announced was soon to strike Bowie Bar.

A short time would develop whether the gold piece had fallen heads at the instigation of fate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TERRIBLE TRAP.

GRIZZLY DICK certainly had information of Flash Dan's advance upon the gold camp, or he would not have spoken as positively as he had.

It was audacity itself for Dick to show himself at the Bar after his last bloody exploit—the shooting of Quartz Rock and Sudden Sam, whom he had inveigled to the mountains with a lie—but he was one of those fellows who delight to carry their hearts on their sleeves and who know no fear.

Well did he know that the hands of the last of the Banded Blades would henceforth be forever against him, and he had vowed previous to his arrival at the Bar that his hand should ever be against them in turn.

He walked from Sandy's den toward the mountain side of the camp, where ran the rough stage-trail that went over the Sierra to Carson and Virginia City.

"I war about an hour ahead ov Flash Dan," he said as he halted not far from the last cabin and placed himself in a position of waiting. "I'll stay hyar an' witness ther grand entry. Mebbe I'll take a hand in ther game afore Windy Rube an' pards git a chance; but that'll depend on who comes. Thar's one thing I want ter live fer an' thet's ter make thet mountain pink queen ov somewhar. Ov course, I'm no handsomer than my name, but thet makes no difference. I heard a feller say once in 'Frisco thet a rose by any other name 'd smell just as sweet, an' I guess thet's a solid fact. Now just come along, Flash Dan. Thar's ther dandiest layout in Bowie Bar at this writin' thet you ever met. Lead an' steel ar' trumps hyer, my silver galoot. Come along, an' test 'em."

Grizzly Dick in the shadow of the rocks looked like a part of the heap himself, but a part that had a human shape.

Why didn't somebody come just to oblige the gold camp outlaw?

"It's a bad watch for the night," he said at last, at the end of his patience. "Flash Dan has changed his mind; he has gone back. When it came ter ther pinch his boasted courage failed him. He'd rayther go back ter ther monte tables ov Carson an' toss the cards than come hyer an' die. Good sense, thet, Flash Dan." And Grizzly Dick ended his last sentence with a laugh.

He would have left his watch-box a moment afterward if a human figure had not crossed his line of vision.

It kept him a statue still, but all at once he threw up his right hand and the man who had come started at the click of a revolver's lock.

"Hands up or I'll let stariight explore yer brain!" grated Grizzly Dick. "Don't I know ye, though? Whar's yer Injun pard?"

The person addressed had already thrown one hand toward his belt, but the revolver that already covered him checked it there.

Behind the weapon Grizzly Dick's eyes flashed triumphantly, and a ferocious grin distorted his countenance.

The man he had stopped was not Flash Dan, although he had asked him about his Indian pard.

He was still a young man with a magnificent figure and strikingly handsome, one of those frontier Apollos who, fearless and daring, commanded attention everywhere.

He looked into the muzzle of the revolver which he could have touched by putting forth his hand, and then over it at the man who gripped it.

"So it's you, is it?" he said having paid no attention to Dick's last question. "If I'm not too inquisitive, I'd like ter know who helped ye out o' the lasso thet swung yer over Grimdeath Canyon?"

"You didn't, thet's sartain," retorted Grizzly Dick. "The chap what did stands before ye."

"What! had you no help?"

"Nary help. I got out ov ther fix myself an' thet's why I'm hyer. Thet Injun pard ov yers is a dandy wilcat, but let me git ther drop on him. I assure ye thet a sart'in red will turn his moccasin toes toward ther everlastin' stars. Whar is he?"

"I don't know."

"You hev'n't dissolved pardnership a'ready, Stanislaus?"

"I think so. We never did promise ter be friends. It war a forced pardnership, you see. All ther time we war watchin' one another like hawks, with our hands ready ter jump at the trigger."

"Thet's Gospel, eh?" queried Grizzly Dick as he leaned forward to scrutinize the expression on the man's face.

"Why should I lie?" retorted Stanislaus Steve who, for some purpose, had come back to Bowie Bar. "The red-skin met me accidentally. He could have killed me. I don't know why he did not. Ef I see him, I'll agree ter drive a bullet through his head."

"Fer refusin' ter wipe yer out, Stanislaus?"

"No; because he's the pard ov ther man from Nevada."

"Then," said Grizzly Dick dropping the revolver an inch, "then, we oughtn't ter be foes." Stanislaus Steve's silence lasted a moment.

"I think so, too," he said. "You an' I, Grizzly, ar' hated by ther same men."

"Thet's so."

"An' we've never been great enemies."

The revolver dropped to Grizzly Dick's side. "I'm willin'," he said, thrusting forward an empty hand. "Thar's a fist thet never shook a true pard, Stanislaus. Take it er refuse it, as ye like."

Stanislaus Steve looked at the hand for a moment and then took it cordially.

He came close up to Grizzly Dick during the grasp and gazed into his face.

Perhaps he had suspicions despite Dick's words.

He might have feared that the partnership was only one of convenience so far as Dick was concerned.

"I warn't waitin' for you hyer, Stanislaus," Grizzly said as the two hands dropped apart. "Awhile ago Flash Dan war on his way ter Bowie Bar."

"Alone?"

"No. Modoc Kate war with him."

"What! haven't they found Myra yet?"

"I don't know about thet. They war on their way, I say, an' ef they hed kept on they'd be hyar now."

"Whar did they stop?"

"I don't know, nor why. I war waitin' for 'em when you came along. Do you think Flash Dan 'd turn back?"

"I don't. He's cool enough to march single-handed on perdition."

"Then I hope he'll turn up yet. Hev you come back for a fight?"

"Not for a fight, though I'll not shake one," was the answer. "Isn't Bowie Bar my home?"

"Yes, but—"

"Windy Rube an' his last two pards ar' on ther dead drop now."

"Last two?" said Stanislaus Steve. "Who's reduced ther Banded Blades ter three men?"

"Grizzly Dick!" was the answer, to eyes that flashed with fierce pride.

"An' you ar' hyer in ther buzzards' nest?"

"I should gently whisper, Stanislaus. What do yer say ter goin' up inter camp an' makin' things lively while we wait for Flash Dan an' his pards?"

Stanislaus Steve hesitated for a moment as if the proposition threatened interference with certain plans of his own, but Grizzly Dick saw the eager light that lit up his eyes.

"The girl isn't hyer?" he asked.

"Not thet I know ov. I'm almost sartain she isn't."

"Come on, then."

There was no delay and the two men who, under other circumstances, would have torn one another's throats, turned their backs upon the mountains and went up into the gold camp.

"What shall ther objective pint be?" asked Stanislaus. "Whar shall be begin?"

"It's an hour since I left an' mebbe we'll find them at ther rejuvenated Smilin' Corpse Saloon. Sandy has superseded Pilgrim Pete who never came back from huntin' thet copper serpent. We'll strike ther den first, Stanislaus."

Half a minute later the two desperadoes were moving upon the whisky-den.

Their intention to "make things lively" might be attended with some difficulties, especially if they should find the trap well filled with the dark shirts of Bowie Bar, but nothing daunted them.

"Hang me, ef Sandy's got a single cust' er!" suddenly cried Grizzly Dick, as through the open door of the saloon they both saw the new barkeeper leaning on the counter the sole occupant so far as they could see of the retreat.

"I did expect thet Windy Rube an' pards would be back samplin' Sandy's brands ov light-nin'," Grizzly Dick went on, exhibiting disappointment in his tones. "We'll hev ter hunt ther picnic elsewhar, Steve."

"But we'll sample his p'sen first," said Stanislaus. "Who made Sandy Pilgrim Pete's successor?"

"The stage thet come through the day arter Pilgrim Pete disappeared. It war loaded with wet goods for ther trap, an' ther boys elected Sandy custodian an' dispenser. Thet's how he came ter grace thet counter with his cherubic bust."

Stanislaus Steve smiled and passed on.

At the same moment the two men crossed the threshold of the liquor den, and advanced toward the counter.

Their appearance roused the barkeeper into life, but surprise beamed in his eye when they alighted on Stanislaus.

"Hyar's ther driest man in Californy, Sandy, my hollyhock," said Grizzly Dick, glancing at his companion. "You'll oblige him if you'll set out yer choicest snake-root. The prodigal's back ter Bowie Bar; let yer best whisky be ther fatted calf, Sandy."

The dispenser of the vile stuff sold in the gold camp looked covertly toward the door before he made an effort to comply with Grizzly Dick's demands.

And why?

A moment later the door shut with a harsh bang and the two worthies at the counter recoiled with sudden cries.

"Throw up yer number fives, my dandies!" said the man who had been concealed by it while it remained open. "I warn't lookin' for two birds, but I'll deal with 'em both all ther same. What fetched you back to Bowie Bar, Stanislaus? When did you grow tired of life, gold-camp curse?"

The speaker faced the startled men with a cocked revolver in each hand which was outstretched.

He stood with his back to the door against which he had braced his right heel.

A demon's triumph lit up his black eyes.

"You've got ther drop on us, Windy Rube," said Grizzly Dick as he looked between the six-shooters into the merciless face of the boss of the Bar. "I suppose we are to be shot down like dogs."

"Like Quartz Rock and Sudden Sam war, eh?" hissed Captain Rube. "Do you think I'm hyer ter spare an' ter shake hands? Don't feast yerselves on any such grapes ez thet. By ther horns ov Satan! I'm here ter kill! You, Stanislaus Steve, shall play for Mountain Myra no more, an' ther galoot who stands at yer side will never cut another man from a rope thet swings over a canyon!"

The stunning report of a revolver followed the last sentence which scarcely seemed human voiced, so madly was it hissed, and Stanislaus Steve dropped on the floor at the foot of the counter.

"Fool he war ter come back ter Bowie Bar!" continued Windy Rube. "Hands up, thar, Grizzly! We'll see whose picnic this is!"

Grizzly Dick stood like a statue before Windy Rube, with his bronze hands elevated above his head.

He was still covered by the gold sport's revolvers and across the counter at his left hand was the ashen face of Sandy, the whisky spider.

It was a striking tableau.

"We'll extend this picnic," Windy Rube went on after a brief pause. "Come out ov yer web, Sandy, an' fetch ther hull camp hyer. I'll hold this galoot at ther muzzles ov my revolvers. Afore mornin' Bowie Bar shall hev ther daisiest picnic ov its life."

Grizzly Dick did not stir, and Sandy came from behind the counter and left the saloon.

Grizzly had walked into a terrible trap.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FLUNG BACK TO HIS FOES.

GRIZZLY DICK did not attempt to compromise with the wild-eyed man who held him at the mercy of the deadliest revolver at Bowie Bar.

He stood beside Stanislaus Steve's body that lay motionless at the foot of the counter, but he did not glance down to see whether death had settled in the handsome desperado's eyes.

On the contrary, he looked at Windy Rube, who waited quietly and in triumph for Sandy's return.

Not far from this scene, and on the outside of the saloon, of course, stood one of the most important characters of our romance.

He was the man for whom the three pards of the gold camp had been waiting.

Flash Dan!

It was evident that he had just entered camp, and if he had not entered it alone, his companions were not visible.

Armed of course the Nabob was.

He stood between two cabins and faced the famous whisky-den, so that when Sandy opened it and stepped out on his mission, he saw him.

When Sandy disappeared, Flash Dan stepped forward and did not halt until he reached the door of the den.

There was no trace of excitement in his eyes; he was perfectly cool, and stood erect at the door, calm as a summer's day.

For all that, Flash Dan had come to Bowie Bar for a terrible purpose.

He had found Mountain Myra, Lonely Jack's child, as we have seen, and now the remainder of his trail should lead to vengeance.

"I'll find 'em all thar—Windy an' ther hull gang, I guess," he said, in low tones to himself, when he had watched Sandy out of sight. "Ef thet galoot thet just left ther ranch had left ther door open, I could see what war goin' on on ther inside. But he wouldn't do thet; he had ter shut it."

Flash Dan stood motionless and watchful for some time at the door.

He would have given a good deal if he could have got to survey the interior of the place for a moment only, but nobody offered to accommodate him.

"I'll try it, anyhow," he said at last, curbing his eagerness no longer.

He was about to carry his thought into execution when voices fell upon his ear and he saw half a dozen figures coming toward the saloon.

They were the men Sandy had already hunted up, the bronzed fellows of the gold camp whom Windy Rube intended to treat to the "daisiest picnic" the Bar had ever had.

Flash Dan changed his mind at sight of the men, and instead of walking into the saloon, he stepped unseen around the corner, and stood in the shadow of the shanty.

"Picnic did Sandy say, eh?" laughed one of the men. "The kind Windy Rube will give ar' likely ter hev pistols an' bowies in it. Hyer we ar', Raybold; open the door an' walk in."

The sentence was hardly finished ere the deed was done.

The fellow called Raybold gave the saloon door a smart push and it flew wide revealing to a lot of astonished men the startling tableau on the inside.

"Hyer we ar'!" rung out the voice of Windy Rube as the foremost men left the threshold. "Whar's Bart an' Faro? You see we're goin' ter hev a picnic an' I must hev my Blades with me. I found two ov 'em hyer—Stanislaus an' Grizzly; one's at ther end ov his trail, an' the other's gittin' thar."

Flash Dan in the shadow with his hand on his revolver heard every word.

He did not move, nor did he even glance

around the corner of the whisky-den to get a glimpse of the situation.

Nothing seemed to astonish him.

He knew that Windy Rube held Grizzly Dick in a trap of some kind, that Stanislaus had been put out of the way of doing harm—all this he knew without having used his eyes to obtain the information.

All at once two men sprung into the saloon and were received with a cry of exultation by Windy Rube.

"Hyer's the twin panthers! hyer's Faro an' Bart. Look at thet daisy yonder, pards. They came together, the one on the floor an' thet one standin' up. They caught this gold-camp chick behind ther door, an' ere they tasted Sandy's pisen I hed 'im under my droppers! Who's got a rope?"

If Flash Dan could have looked into the Smiling Corpse Saloon at that moment, he would have seen the semblance of a defiant sneer at the corners of Grizzly Dick's mouth, a flash of fearlessness in his dark eyes.

"Call it trap er what ye will," he said, "I'm in it. I stand hyer makin' no apologies, askin' no mercy. Bring on yer rope an' go on with yer picnic. But Windy Rube dare not fight fair on this floor, nor anywhere else, the galoot, whose pard he shot like he'd shoot a wolf."

"Thar's no chance fer ye, Grizzly," said Faro Phil. "Ef Windy wanted ter fight yer, he shouldn't. Some men ar' nat'ral-born darned fools. What in ther name ov Heaven an' earth brought ye back ter Bowie Bar?"

"Bizness! Since I began ter wear boots, I've been goin' whar I please, an' until now no livin' man has asked me why nor wharfore."

The coolness of the speaker, situated as he was, was remarkable.

"All hunki," said Windy Rube. "We won't seek ter know what fetched ye back ter Bowie. Ye'r hyer; thet's enough. I regret ter inform ye, Grizzly, thet thar'll be no hand ter hand tussle between us to-night. In ther picnic about ter take place, we'll all take a hand, an' with ther lasso we'll avenge ther cowardly shootin' ov Quartz Rock an' Sudden Sam."

"What!" said the Nabob in the shadow of the shanty, "ar' thar but three ov ther Banded Blades left fer me? All right, Windy Rube, pull up the man who dropped 'em. Hang me ef I interfere in this game."

The silence of a minute followed Windy Rube's last sentence.

"Thar's no use in talkin' hyer," the boss of Bowie Bar suddenly resumed. "Hands up ag'in, Grizzly. I whisper gently thet ter disobey will lay ye alongside ov Stanislaus, yer last fool pard."

Faro Phil and Big Bart stepped toward Grizzly Dick as he elevated his hands above his head, and in a moment stood beside him with cocked revolvers.

"Gentlemen ov Bowie," said Windy Rube, addressing the twenty gold-diggers who had reached the saloon. "There is a law hyer that whosoever sheds the blood ov a citizen ov Bowie Bar, by us shall his blood be shed. The example stands afore us. Sudden Sam an' Quartz Rock, citizens ov this camp, hev fallen afore Grizzly's dropper—shot down afore they could lift a hand in self-defense—murdered! By thet law sentence is already passed on him. We hev but ter execute it. I waive all desire ter chance him a single tussle. Windy Rube stands by ther immutable laws of the gold lands. The rope an' the tree awaits the slayer. Thar he stands, pards of Bowie Bar. Now, do yer duty!"

The outstretched hand of Windy Rube covered the man who stood captive between Big Bart and Faro Phil.

"Forward!" whispered the last-named tough to Grizzly Dick. "Make way thar, pards."

The men cleared a path to the door, and the two bronzed guards had taken a step forward when with sudden force and motion Grizzly Dick threw wide his muscled arms!

In an instant Phil and Bart fell from him, the one against the counter, the other staggering across the room, and then with a tigerish leap the victor went toward the open door!

"Not yet, hounds ov Bowie!" pealed from his throat. "Stand aside, er I'll crush yer skulls." He dashed down the living lane with the resistless force of a thunderbolt.

"Stop him! Wing ther daisy devil!" yelled Windy Rube.

Revolvers clicked on all sides, and a man seized the door to fling it shut.

In a second as it were the interior of the den was a veritable pandemonium.

"Stop me, stop lightning!" shouted Grizzly Dick as he cleared the threshold. "When I come back, thar'll be worse than a hangin' at Bowie Bar."

"When you come back, eh? I guess you'll not get away!"

These sentences fell from the lips of a giant as he stepped from the shadow of the shanty.

A bound carried him to Grizzly Dick's side, and the next moment a pair of hands gripped the astonished desperado's collar.

"Back among the avengers ov blood!" was hissed at his ear. "They want ter hang ye, Grizzly Dick, an' by the eternal stars! they shall!"

Grizzly Dick looked once into the face of the speaker.

"Ther silver Nabob!" he exclaimed.

"Flash Dan at yer service!" grinned the silver sport, and he forced Grizzly toward the door. His strength was prodigious, his determination perfectly irresistible.

"Hyer's yer victim, pards ov Bowie!" he said as he pushed the gold-camp ruffian into the faces of the men who were recovering from their consternation. "Grace the handiest limb with the carkiss ov Sir Grizzly, ov Bowie Bar. Walk in an' take yer bitters, Grizzly!"

The miners who had reached the door by this time recoiled with exclamations of astonishment at the sight revealed by the lamplight that streamed over their heads.

"Go in—no flinchin' now!" laughed Flash Dan, and with a sudden push he forced Grizzly Dick across the step and threw him into the midst of the men who wanted him.

This sudden change in Grizzly Dick's fortunes had not occupied more than the space of a minute.

He fell among the bronze men of Bowie Bar, and immediately attempted to rise; but a dozen hands seized his person, and he found himself gripped in a manner that prevented escape.

"That cools me down," said Flash Dan as he walked off unrecognized by the roughs in the ranch.

"I'll wait till arter the hangin' afore I take another hand. Got hyer just in time ter sarve Grizzly Dick a trick he never dreamed ov, didn't I? Thet sets us pretty nigh even, Grizzly. *Au revoir*, Senor Dick!"

It was some moments before the man flung headlong back among the wild fellows who wanted his blood, found the use of his tongue.

"Who shot ye back hyer, Grizzly?" demanded Windy Rube. "Shoot me ef ye didn't reappear like ye war shot from a cannon."

"Mebbe I war," was the retort. "I feel kinder thet way, anyhow."

"But who did yer encounter out thar? You met somebody; thet's why ye came back so sudden."

Grizzly Dick showed his teeth in a perplexing grin.

"Shoot ther information out ov 'im!" flashed Big Bart, as he thrust his revolver into Dick's face. "I'll give him one half minute ter tell—"

"You'll find out soon enough!" interrupted Dick through clenched teeth.

"Sartainly we will, I've an idea who it war," said Windy Rube. "Take down yer shooter, Bart—thar! We'll thank ther man what flung Dick back among us an' arter ther picnic we'll hunt him down."

"Thet is," muttered Dick, "ef he doesn't find you first."

With Grizzly Dick once more in their clutches the wild men of Bowie Bar started from the saloon, and, headed by Windy Rube, marched toward the tree that shaded Mountain Myra's cabin.

Captain Rube had cause to remember the spot for Crested Hawk the "red slugger," as he had dubbed the red-skin, had sent him senseless to the ground under that very tree.

The cheeks of the gold rough thus marched to doom never blanching.

Men of Grizzly Dick's ilk seldom quail in the shadow of the noose.

When the tree was reached the entire population of Bowie Bar was congregated about it.

A rough three-legged stool had been carried to the spot by some one, and placed under the stoutest limb overhead.

Several torches furnished light for the scene, which was one which the gold camp had witnessed but twice in its existence.

"Jehosaphat! I've come hyer without shuttin' up my trap!" suddenly ejaculated Sandy, the whisky spider. "What a chance for thet infernal Injun ter play cyclone ag'in! I'm bankrupt ef he plays it ez completely ez he did when Pilgrim Pete run ther ranch. I'll just waltz back an' secure my liquid treasures."

"You'll stay hyer an' see this fun out," said a member of the group. "Think ov it! a genuine pullin' up, with a former citizen ov ther Bar fer ther victim! Ther Injun won't come, Sandy, my hollyhock with the strawberry smeller. Stay!"

And Sandy concluded to remain and see the doom of Grizzly Dick.

Having brought the big victim to the place of death, Windy Rube was determined that there should be precious little ceremony.

Why fool with a man who had shot down two of the Banded Blades? Why show mercy to a man whose entire life had been utterly devoid of it?

"Thar's ter be no preliminaries," said Windy Rube, sternly. "We stand on no ceremony hyer. Toss the lasso over head an' limb, an' pull the killer ov his betters toward ther stars!"

These words were heard by men who did not hesitate to obey.

During the march to the tree, a rope had been passed around Grizzly Dick's body, effectually pinning his arms at his sides.

The pards of Bowie had resolved that the scene lately witnessed in the saloon should not be repeated.

In a few moments after Windy Rube's last command, the splendid figure of Grizzly Dick stood on the stool beneath the limb which had been selected for the gallows beam.

The noose lay on his shoulders in such a manner that a slight pull would tighten it under his chin.

"We ar' men ov bizness, Grizzly Dick," said Windy Rube, stepping back a step or two and throwing toward the doomed man a look of triumph. "We kin carry on Bowie Bar without yer. Time war when we war friends, but now we part enemies. Ther Banded Blades will yet rule the roost. We'll git thar at the end, Grizzly!"

More individuals than Dick and his executioners heard these words.

A few yards away, with arms folded and contemplating the scene in which he had decided not to interfere, stood Flash Dan, the Nevada Nabob; and dragging his body foot by foot over the ground toward the tree, in a manner that indicated that every movement caused terrible pain, was seen another human being.

"Let me hold out another minute, an' I'll sow death among 'em," gasped and grated the feeble crawler. "By the gods ov vengeance when I go, it'll not be alone! Thar'll be ther biggest plant to-morrow in the mountain graveyard it ever had!"

Nobody heard these utterances, and no one saw that the desperate ruffian held a revolver in each hand.

"Ready!" suddenly cried Windy Rube. "We now take vengeance for Quartz Rock an' Sudden Sam. Look yer last on Bowie, Grizzly Dick. Watch yer leader, you pards at ther rope. When I drop my hat, pull the doomed hustler up."

In another instant a slight draw had tightened the noose about Grizzly's neck, and Windy Rube held his hat out in the midst of profound silence.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RED THUNDERBOLT.

ONE might have heard a coin drop on the ground covered by the mob of Bowie Bar.

Windy Rube was the figure most observed at that moment, as he stood erect in the torch-light with his lead-colored sombrero in his bronzed right hand.

The hat was loosely gripped between finger and thumb, and was liable to drop to the ground at any moment.

But all at once the scene was changed, and in a manner and from a place totally unlooked for.

"I'll give 'im the grand send-off now," passed through Captain Rube's brain, and the next second would have ushered Grizzly Dick into eternity by the lasso route if he had not gone thither another way.

Suddenly there dropped from the branches overhead an object which the crowd took for a gigantic panther, but they were soon and terribly undeceived.

"Great God! the red slugger!" cried Windy Rube, recoiling with eyes that seemed to start from their sockets.

A wild yell rent the air as the red-skin struck the ground, and all saw the flash of the bowie that his right hand held.

It was the famous silver-handled blade, known and feared throughout the gold lands! Crested Hawk was at Grizzly Dick in the twinkling of an eye.

The ruffian was at his mercy; but did he spare?

If he had, he would not have been the man he was known to be; and the Crested Hawk of Shasta was merciless.

"Grizzly want silver bowie, eh?" hissed the Indian, as he leaped at the camp ruffian before one man of all the astonished lot could recover sufficiently to interpose a hand! "Him steal knife once, an' say him give it to Crested Hawk, but in his heart Grizzly can have it now!"

Then it was that the knife flashed again, and in the face of the man who had been borne from the stool by the impetuous Indian whose red hand was at his throat.

The blow was not delayed.

Down came the silver bowie driven with all the force that the right arm was capable of wielding, and the man who was instantly released fell back with his life-blood on his dark shirt!

"Him steal no more knives, eh?" cried the Klamath turning upon Windy Rube with ferocious visage. "Git out ov the warrior's path. Let him through!"

The bowie made a sweep in front of the Indian's face, but at the length of his arm and he leaped forward like a mountain cat.

Nobody opposed him; the toughs of Bowie Bar recoiled with a haste that was ludicrous.

They went back pell-mell, with a rush and without ceremony.

It was anything to escape the knife which ended Grizzly Dick's life in such a terrible manner.

Crested Hawk landed six feet beyond the crowd, and while his second yell awoke the echoes

of the mountains that towered above the gold camp, he disappeared with the suddenness that characterized his fearful coming.

"Heavens! who looked for a thunderbolt from that direction?" exclaimed Flash Dan from the place where he had stationed himself to witness the execution of Grizzly Dick. "Thet red war the last man I expected ter see hyer. He dropped on 'em like a flash, an' just in time ter git in his work. They don't know what ter make ov it yet. It's no dream, Windy Rube. Thet thunderbolt war alive!"

Windy Rube seemed to be the first man to recover from the surprise caused by the Indian and his retributive work.

No one had expected him; the men who threw the rope over the stanch limb had not caught sight of the dark figure that was all the while crouched in a fork almost within arm's reach.

"Is Grizzly dead? Look ter him first," said the boss of Bowie Bar.

Faro Phil and Big Bart went forward and held a torch close to the body the Indian had left on the ground.

Dead?

The features already set told that Dick was dead.

One stroke of the silver-handled bowie had proved enough!

"Dead as last year's bird's nest," said Faro Phil, turning to Windy Rube from contemplating the rough's features. "Shall we hunt ther red cyclone?"

"Sartainly! He b'longs ter ther gang thet war comin' ter clean out ther Banded Blades. Flash Dan is the head ov the movement. Hunt thet Injun? To ther death!"

But where look for the red-skin who had already disappeared?

Windy Rube turned toward the spot from whence they had lately led Grizzly Dick to doom.

"Halt! every mother's son ov yer!" exclaimed a voice which seemed to emanate from the ground a few feet away.

"Who's thet?" inquired Captain Rube leaning forward with ready weapon.

"A galoot within ten feet ov ther boundary line ov life!" was the quick reply. "Stanislaus Steve, shot through and through by a man who's goin' ahead ov him ter Tartarus!"

"Stanislaus Steve?"

The name fell in accents of amazement from twenty pairs of lips.

The speakers remembered that they had left the handsome sport for dead at the foot of Sandy's counter, and now he lay before them on the ground.

The torches soon showed the astonished crowd the man on the ground, his prone position, his blanched, death-stricken face, and the unnatural glare of his eyes.

It was a sight terrible enough to startle the bravest, a spectacle more tigerish in aspect than human.

He lay on his breast with his elbows planted on the ground, and his eyes glaring between the two revolvers which he thrust forward.

"Hold on thar, Stanislaus!" exclaimed Windy Rube. "Touch a trigger an' we'll make a sieve out ov you in less than a second."

"A sieve, eh?" and the wounded sport laughed derisively. "Lift a weapon, one ov ye, an' I'll give yer graveyard a few more peaceable citizens. Dyin'? I know it. I'm shot through the life-box, an' by Windy Rube! Oh, what's ther use ov compromisin'? The Injun spiled a picnic, didn't he? Wal, I'll get up another!"

"Not ter-night. Thar! ye'r givin' up now. Ha! ha!"

The laugh was Windy Rube's, and all saw with him that the strength of the man on the ground had suddenly given way.

His hands dropped as if they had been struck down by some unseen power, and the following second he fell forward on his face.

"He couldn't hold out!" cried the crowd.

There was a rush forward, but the gold sport suddenly raised himself, and with a spasmodic strength the revolvers went up again.

The crowd was almost upon him.

"Crush him! Don't let him use his droppers!" was the cry.

Too late!

That same minute the pistols of Stanislaus Steve opened at point-blank range on the men of Bowie Bar.

The rough took no aim, for none was needed.

He had but to shoot into the dense crowd to draw blood.

The gold-camp minions reeled from the flashes of the two pistols which the wounded desperado worked with a strength and coolness that astonished all.

Men fell to the ground without a groan, others staggered back with oaths and cries.

It was a "picnic" for which the mob had not bargained.

In the midst of the slaughter, the madman's strength suddenly failed again.

This time he did not rise and shoot any more.

"Riddle him!" yelled Windy Rube. "Nol Carry him to the tree! By Jehu! we'll hev a hangin' yit."

The proposition seemed to meet with immediate approbation.

Twenty men sprung upon the man on the ground.

They tore him from it with the fury of a lot of hyenas, and a moment later were dragging him toward the tree to which they had failed to hang Grizzly Dick.

There was a fierce smile of triumph at Stanislaus Steve's mouth; his eyes seemed to twinkle as he looked at the men who bore him forward.

Less than a minute took the crowd to the tree.

"Noose him an' pull him up!" shouted Windy Rube. "Quick! the galoot may die afore ye kin do the job!"

Faro Phil gave his leader a look and said:

"He's dead now, Windy."

A cloud of vengeance balked swept across Windy Rube's mad face.

He hesitated a second.

"String 'im up, anyhow!" he exclaimed. "Ye'r no doctor, Faro, an' ye'r liable ter be mistaken."

The command was obeyed, and the swinging body of Stanislaus Steve was left swinging in mid-air by the men who turned to care for the victims of his last mad use of the revolver.

"His eyes failed him when he began ter shoot," Windy Rube said to his two pards when all three found themselves separated from the miners a short time after these startling events. "He hed marked me out. I saw it by ther blaze in his eyes ther first time he kivered us, but thet last spell blinded him. Wal, what a wild time it war. Jawhiz! how thet red thunderbolt struck Grizzly Dick an' put an end to our picnic. I warn't expectin' any interference."

"He's likely ter turn up ag'in," said Big Bart. "Ov course, an' when an' whar nobody knows."

"I should remark thet they don't. I threw the rope over the limb, but I saw no Injun in the tree."

Windy Rube was silent.

He had halted at the door of his own cabin, and his hand was about to push it open.

"Look hyer. We'll stop not till we've fought this last fight to ther end!" he said suddenly and with a desperado's determination as was exhibited in his eyes. "Join me at Sandy's at ther end ov an hour. Tell Sandy ter reserve ther place. When thet Injun are hyer Flash Dan can't be far off. At Sandy's in an hour. Remember!"

"We'll be thar," said the two pards in chorus, and Windy Rube turned into his shanty.

"Two less anyhow of I didn't hev a hand in it," he said in audible tones as he struck a lucifer along one of the rough logs that formed the walls of his cabin. "I must confess thet affairs ar' havin' a business look at ther old Bar. Who comes next? Flash Dan, I expect, of not the red slugger who played one ov ther mo t darin' games ter-night I ever saw an Injun take a hand in. Hello! who's been hyer?"

Windy Rube's exclamation was caused by a piece of paper which he caught sight of that moment.

It was fastened by some means to one of the logs, and he knew it had been placed there during a brief absence from the shanty.

Candle in hand, and burning with curiosity, the stalwart boss of Bowie Bar went up to the wall, and leaned forward to read the writing on the paper:

It was briefly this:

"CAPTAIN RUBE:—I am here to strike for the Tahoe Infant. His Mother!"

All at once Windy Rube burst into a brutal laugh.

"You in ther game too, Modoc Kate?" he exclaimed. "By heavens! woman, if I catch you in my path I won't hesitate ter choke yer! Keep clear ov Windy Rube. Hyer, eh? Whar ar' ye?"

"I am here!"

The ruffian wheeled as if a rattlesnake had sounded his warning at his heels.

His quick eyes instantly caught sight of the speaker, and for him to see was to spring.

"I'll keep my word, viper!" he hissed. "I'll choke ther mother ov ther babe I hung!"

The bound was resistless, and the woman was forced across the room with a bronzed claw at her throat.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IN THE LAST TRAP.

IF Windy Rube had reached his cabin a few moments sooner, he would have caught Modoc Kate in the act of posting the paper on the wall in the spot where he had discovered it.

She had not had time to leave the place before the sound of his feet forced her into one of the dark corners where she might have escaped detection, notwithstanding the light if she had controlled herself and kept quiet.

Captain Rube was too quick in action for the Trigger Queen, and she suddenly found herself in his clutches, and forced into a corner where he threatened to choke her to death.

"Back hyer for vengeance, eh?" laughed Rube madly, as he glared into Kate's eyes like a tiger. "You couldn't hev come at a worse time, I'm thinkin'. Don't yer think so yerself, Kate?"

The woman did not reply because the dark fingers that caught her throat prevented speech of any kind.

Captain Rube, full of ferocity, was going to carry out a threat made a few moments before; it would not be his fault if Modoc Kate were not choked to death then and there.

"Don't try ter git loose, my tigress," he cried. "My hand's a trap from which nobody has ever escaped. So ther Infant—yer offspring, is dead, eh? By George! ther hull camp war surprised ter hear yer claim ther body. Kinder queer thet you should hev lived hyer all ther time an' never own him afore."

Kate's eyes glistened, but there was no reply.

"Will yer leave Bowie Bar forever ef I show mercy?" asked Captain Rube, loosening his heartless grip just a little. "Will yer swear ter go away an' never bother any ov us any more?"

Modoc Kate gasped for a moment.

"I'll swear to nothing!" she suddenly said with resolution. "A hand at my throat shall never force an oath from me!"

"Ho! ho!" laughed Windy Rube coarsely.

"I've offered life an' ye would not accept it."

"Not at *your* hands!"

"Mighty particular, strikes me!"

"I will not accept even life at the hands of the man who hanged my boy."

"Then ye'll hev ter take death, Kate."

"Death be it, then!"

The last sentence told Windy Rube that he had to dispose of his bitter enemy there, or receive from her in the future a blow that would blight all his prospects forever.

"Can't stay hyer all night. Got other fish ter fry!" he exclaimed, and again his hand went back to the woman's throat, and once more she was pushed into the corner. "Which way would yer sooner die—by hand er bowie?"

The answer came in a manner and from a source sufficiently startling to remove the hand from the avenging woman's throat.

The door of the cabin was suddenly flung open with no apparent noise, and there stepped across the threshold a stalwart man whose figure threw a gigantic shadow on the wall.

A hand shot forward and caught Windy Rube's arm.

At the touch, the boss of Bowie Bar wheeled with a sharp cry.

"Jehu! Flash Dan himself!" he exclaimed.

The man who had entered went back a foot.

"Thet's what I'm called whar I'm known!" he said coolly, looking the astonished ruffian squarely in the eye. "Ye'll oblige me if you'll let that woman alone. I'm hyer, Windy Rube. Tackle a *man* when yer want ter fight!"

The two famous characters of the Sierra stood face to face in the candle light.

Captain Rube's hand dropped away from Modoc Kate's throat, and she slipped from the corner, but not from the cabin, for she intended to witness the result of the meeting between the two men.

"Wal, shall it be fight hyer?" suddenly said Rube, in a voice that strongly suggested a challenge. "Say the word, Flash Dan—give this gold chick a chance, an' we'll go at it, with Kate thar for referee an' witness."

A smile appeared at the corners of the Nabob's mouth.

"Not hyer, but I expect it'll be a fight, just the same," he said quietly. "You must know that I've found Myra?"

"Yes."

"An' she is Lonely Jack's child, sure enough. Ther picture in the locket thet Crested Hawk found in the mountains several years ago just fits her. My girl-hunt is ended, but I'm goin' ter hev a little hunt ov my own."

"Revenge, eh?"

"Perhaps."

"You won't find alive the six pards who came down hyer from Shasta-land arter we banished you an' Lonely Jack from Nugget City."

"I know that. Death has been at work."

"An' he's spared but three ov us, but he left the most dangerous ones of the hull lot."

There was boastfulness in Captain Rube's tones.

"Whar will I be likely ter find ther other two?" suddenly asked Flash Dan.

"Whar ye dare not go with me!" was the retort.

The depths of the Nabob's black eyes suddenly flashed up.

"What's thet?" he cried. "Did yer just say, Windy, thet the two pards ar' whar I'm afraid ter go?"

"Thet's what I said."

"Name the place."

"It's ther head-quarters ov Bowie Bar."

"Pilgrim Pete's!" cried Modoc Kate.

"Sandy's it is now," said Rube.

"Oho! come on, then. If thar I kin find the remnant ov ther Shasta six thar's whar I'm goin'. Dare you go with me?"

Windy Rube stepped instantly toward the door.

"I'm yer man!" he cried. "By ther stars ov heaven! let this night see everything settled 'twixt us in Bowie Bar."

Modoc Kate looked at the two men who walked from the cabin into the street of the gold camp.

"They will go there and fight," she said. "The saloon will prove a trap for the Nevada Nabob. He won't have a show with the revolvers that will be found in it to-night. He must not fight it out alone. He shall not!"

A little while longer she watched the two men on until they had both disappeared, and then walked in an opposite direction.

Let us follow Flash Dan and his companion.

Windy Rube walked fast, as if eager to conduct the silver king to the place designated in his cabin.

They came suddenly upon the door of the Smiling Corpse Saloon, on this occasion, as on all others, wide open.

"I'll be square with ye, Flash Dan," said Windy Rube suddenly with a glance at the Nabob.

"In yon den just now ar' ther maddest men Bowie Bar ever saw. Yer red pard helped ter make 'em so by finishin' Grizzly Dick an' spoilin' our hanging. Then, arter thet, Stanislaus Steve opened on 'em with his drop-pers, an' died shootin' for keeps."

The man from Nevada looked into the saloon with compressed lips and keen eyes.

It was evident that Windy Rube's words had no terrors for him.

"Wal, go on," he said to Rube.

"Thet's all I hev ter say," was the reply. "I thought I'd give yer ther lay o' ther land."

"Thanks, but I've concluded ter go on," coolly said Flash Dan.

A few steps more and the light of the lamps that illuminated the whisky-den fell on the figures of Windy Rube and Flash Dan just outside the door.

The entire population of the gold camp was congregated in the ranch, all there except the few who had preceded Stanislaus to the land of the dread unseen.

The counter was hidden from view by the men who stood alongside.

"You don't need any introduction ter a part ov ther crowd," said Windy Rube, with a quick glance at Flash Dan. "We'll just go in now an' astonish ther boys."

When he reached the threshold the Nevada Nabob was at his side and the two men crossed it at the same time.

"Jerusalem! look thar!" roared out a voice from among the men at the bar and a bronzed hand instantly covered the twain. "Thet compromise beats all creation. Flash Dan an' Windy Rube pards! Take thet picter in, boys, an' never say thet panthers won't make up."

The entire crowd had wheeled upon the twain, and were staring at them astonished and in silence.

"It's no compromise!" suddenly cried Windy Rube, and as he spoke he stepped from the Nabob but still regarded the crowd. "Men ov Bowie, thar stands a man not unknown ter yer by reputation. More'n five years ago in ther Shasta kentry we sent him adrift tied ter a galoot who came ter Nugget City an' put his hands on ther first thing thet struck his eye."

"Thar! no lyin'!" cried Flash Dan. "I will not listen ter a slander on the man who did not steal then. I am still Lonely Jack's defender though I came hyer ter settle a matter mostly my own bizness. Now, go on."

"Wal, we'll waive thet pint," continued Windy Rube, "though I want ter say thet at ther time we all differed with Flash Dan concernin' Lonely Jack's kyracter. We banished 'em both, I say—tied 'em tergether an' sent 'em off. Some ov ther pards ov Nugget City then afterward became ther Banded Blades ov Bowie Bar. We war six once; we're but three now. Flash Dan hev come hyer fer satisfaction. Hevin' found Mountain Myra, he wants revenge fer ther banishment from Nugget, an' I'm hyer ter say thet he shall hev a chance ter git satisfaction from all he hates."

"From every livin' man, for we're all hyer!" and the speaker, Big Bart, stepped toward Flash Dan with the air of a gladiator. "I'm tired, for one, ov livin' in hot water all my life. When I saw Flash Dan an' Lonely Jack swaltered up by ther mountains thet time I made up my mind thet we'd see one o' t'other some time later. Now, thet's ther one I most thought we'd see. He war Dark Dan then, but Flash Dan now."

During the speeches of the two gold-camp toughs not a muscle of the Nevadan's face betrayed any signs of excitement.

He had drawn his magnificent figure to its true height, and with folded arms surveyed the crowd who, while he was cordially hated, could not but admire his coolness.

"I told you this war ther worse place on earth for you, Dan," said Windy Rube, addressing the silver Nabob.

"Well, seein' thet I'm hyer, I sha'n't back out. I didn't come ter Bowie ter retreat, but I came ter fight the last members ov ther Banded Blades ov this gold camp."

"How?" asked Faro Phil.

"Oh," said Flash Dan, with a smile, "I'm not partic'lar. I'm ther most accommodatin' galoot in ther world. One man at a time an' with any weapons he selects. Pick out yer man."

Windy Rube stepped to the side of his two last pards, and the three walked a few feet

away, and formed an interesting little group when they put their heads together.

"We must trick thet silver wildcat," grated Big Bart. "Git him out ov our way an' we're already nearly out ov ther woods. Fight 'im accordin' ter ther code, an' at ther end ov ther battle ther Banded Blades may hev no existence exceptin' in tradition."

"Thet's right, Bart. I'll offer ter fight first. I'm ther man he's after worse. We'll fight with bowies five feet apart when ther signal's given."

"Shall it actually be a fight, Windy?" queried Faro Phil.

"Thunders, no! When I lift my hand above my head, you an' Bart must finish his career. Will you do it?"

"Yes!" said Big Bart before Phil could reply.

Windy Rube glanced at Faro Phil, and, although that worthy did not speak, he knew he would not fail to second Big Bart's intention.

All at once Rube whirled upon Flash Dan.

"We've decided," he said. "I'm ter fight ye first, Flash Dan. Five feet apart, an' back ter back, with bowies in sheath until ther signal's given—then may Nevada er Californy win!"

"All right. Who's ter be ther first man, did yer say?"

"The boss ov ther Blades—Windy Rube!" and the gold-camp desperado took a step forward. "Measure off five feet, Red Roland. I guess Dan's anxious ter git at it."

In a short time the chosen distance was measured off on the floor of the saloon, and the two extremities designated by a chalk line.

The crowd drew back and assumed positions to witness the duel.

Flash Dan stepped to the chalk-mark nearest him, and saw his enemy advance to his own line.

The miner called Red Roland stepped apart from the crowd.

"Turn—back to back," he said, and the command was obeyed.

This action brought Windy Rube face to face with his two pards.

He saw them lay their hands on the butts of their revolvers.

"Ready!" cried Red Roland, and then, "Turn!—fight!"

The two men wheeled at the same instant, and up shot Windy Rube's right hand.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE AVENGING.

BIG BART and Faro Phil recognized the signal.

Out leaped their heavy revolvers, the locks clicking as the movement was made, and the two men stepped forward at the same instant.

But ere they could throw up their hands, although they were quick motioned, a figure leaped into the saloon, and exclamations of wild astonishment followed.

"Ther Injun! darn his picture!" growled Big Bart.

Yes, in the doorway proudly erect, and with flashing eyes stood the bravest representative of the Klamath tribe.

But a short time before, in the presence of the assembled population of Bowie Bar, he had broken up a hanging with his terrible silver-handled bowie, and now once more he faced them all, not with the knife in hand, but with eyes glaring fiercely over two pistols gripped by his red hands.

Windy Rube gave him a look which darkened his brow.

He and Flash Dan still toed their chalk-mark, ready for the duel which one of the twain at least expected should be fought to the death.

"Take yer red pard away!" suddenly growled Captain Rube. "Confound 'im, he cheated us out ov a hangin' awhile ago, an' he's not wanted hyer. Order 'im away, Dan, an' ther fight'll go on."

"Crested Hawk will watch the gold sport's pards," said the Indian, with eyes fastened on Faro Phil and Big Bart. "They must not lift their revolvers. If they do the Klamath will shoot them dead."

Windy Rube bit his lip deeply chagrined.

His game had been balked and by an Indian. He would have to fight Flash Dan now or show the white feather.

Flash Dan threw a quick look toward the Klamath.

"No fight if he stays," said Windy Rube, and from twenty throats arose the cry of "Take 'im out!" "No Injun second hyer!" "This is a white man's fight!"

But the red-skin never moved; he had planted himself firmly, and stood there like a pillar of stone.

"All right!" growled Rube, after a pause, during which time he had consulted with his two pards in an interchange of glances. "I'll waive all objections to ther red, an' fight. Darn his coppery skin, though, he's no bizness hyer, an' he'll live ter find it out when we've settled our matter, Dan."

"He'll take care ov himself," was the answer, and Flash Dan's left foot crept over the chalk line on the floor.

Once more the two enemies of the gold lands stood face to face, in the right hand of each the formidable bowie of the frontier.

It was a thrilling scene for the brush of the painter, the rough crowd behind Windy Rube, the two foes, and the solitary Indian standing alone with ready weapons and blazing eyes.

For a few moments Windy Rube and Flash Dan glared at one another.

Suddenly, with a savage oath, the leader of the Blades leaped toward the Nabob and at the same time Dan stepped forward so that the two duelists met almost mid-way between the chalk-marks.

The spectators held their breath and expected to see the fearful work begin.

"Curse ye! take ther full length ov this!" hissed Captain Rube, as his bowie descended with good aim, but poor execution.

The eye of Flash Dan had followed the ascent; it saw the gleaming blade come down as well.

Quick as a flash his left hand shot forward, and to Windy Rube's consternation, his arm was arrested in mid-air, and his wrist was firmly clutched by the Nabob's fingers.

Windy Rube instantly shrunk away, but he did not break the grip of the silver sport.

Flash Dan held him firmly, and glared into his face with eyes that made him mad with their triumphant expression.

The crowd instinctively moved forward until the Indian called a halt.

"It is Flash Dan an' Cap'n Rube's fight," said the Klamath coolly.

"The men of gold must stand back till it is over. Crested Hawk looks over the weapons that kill when he feels the triggers."

Big Bart ground his teeth.

"We've got ter kill thet red rattler," he growled to Faro Phil. "Rube's at Flash Dan's mercy an' he'll never spare!"

It was a close situation for the boss of the gold bar.

"I've a mind ter cut yer ter the death," said Flash Dan in low but earnest tones as he looked into the gold sport's face. "You did it five years ago. You headed ther conspiracy ag'in' Lonely Jack; you accused him ov theft when yer own hands put ther missin' things under his blanket. Own up ter it, Windy Rube. Don't lie ter me hyer. It won't do."

"Wal, what ef I did?" snapped the desperado. "We hed no use fer ther gal-hunter an' we hed ter git rid ov 'im some way."

"An' thet way war by a lie."

"Mebbe it war."

"I saw through ther whole scheme an' thet's why I stayed with Lonely Jack," said Flash Dan. "I've witnessed many mean acts in my career, but thet one beats 'em all. I could choke yer an' let yer go. You're too mean ter live, Windy Rube; I don't know ov any livin' person who wishes you well. Confound you! ef Myra war hyer she'd advise me ter sever yer heart-strings with my bowie for yer treatment ov her parent. Gentle-hearted as ther girl is, she wouldn't ask me ter spare you."

Flash Dan had hardly finished ere several exclamations rent the close atmosphere of the whisky-den, and from toward the door came a young girl who halted at the Nabob's side.

"Jehosaphat! the girl nerself!" ejaculated Windy Rube.

"Myra!" cried Flash Dan.

Yes, the beauty of Bowie Bar had come back, and she stood almost between the two enemies, with a hand touching the silver Nabob's arm.

"Don't shed blood," she said in tones full of gentleness, as she looked up into Flash Dan's face. "You have said that I would not ask you to spare Captain Rube, but I do. I heard what you have just said. I know that he sent my father, lashed to you, to the mountains—that he wrongly accused him of theft; but I don't want his life for it. I know that after you pulled this gold-camp wretch out of Grim-death Canyon, he met Nugget Ned and disarmed him, besides leaving him for dead where he encountered him."

A cry escaped from Windy Rube's throat as the girl paused.

"Is thet youngster alive?" he cried.

"Alive, and quite eager to pay you back," answered Myra, with a smile. Then she looked at Flash Dan again.

"Let him go," she said. "Give him privilege to boss this camp, as of old."

"After all thet he hez done?" cried Flash Dan, astonished.

"Yes."

"I'll be hanged if I will, Myra. Thet's askin' a little too much."

"Then you will fight?"

"Yes, an' kill 'im ef I kin!"

The girl drew back, disappointed.

"I'm goin' ter let yer wrist go, Windy," said the Nabob to his foe. "Thar's ter be no more signals. We go at it the moment I drop yer hand. Thar!"

He loosened his grip on the gold sport's wrist the moment he finished, but the next instant there came the thunderous report of a rifle, and with a yell Windy Rube threw high his hands and reeled away.

"Who did thet?" vociferated a score of voices and one-half of the crowd surged toward the door.

"I did it!" said a person who that moment presented herself in the doorway and coolly

faced the crowd with a repeating rifle in her hands. "It is only a life for a life, men of Bowie Bar. The man who lies there with a bullet in his brain took by his infamous orders the life of the simple-minded boy known to you as the Tahoe Infant. That shot is his mother's revenge!"

The men of the gold camp stood confused and speechless.

Faro Phil and Big Bart expected that at any moment the avenging rifle of Modoc Kate would be directed against them; but she did not notice the last two Blades.

One life seemed to be enough.

Flash Dan wheeled and went toward the still beautiful woman whose eyes sparkled like diamonds but full of madness and revenge.

"I didn't look for you hyer," he said.

"But I came, didn't I?"

"Yes, an' spiled a bowie brush."

"I took only that which belonged to me—vengeance," said Kate. "I shall go now."

She walked toward the door, but with her face turned still toward the treacherous crowd whose eyes were flashing like the orbs of thugs.

"Good-night, men ov Californy," said Flash Dan. "I'm goin' away from Bowie Bar. Those two pards yonder I leave fer seed," and his hand covered Faro Phil and Big Bart. "With them you kin start another league ov rascality an' death. When I am wanted you'll probably find me et Carson er Virginia City. We'll all take leave ov yer at once. Pards ov Bowie Bar, farewell!"

The silver Nabob stepped back as he ended, and the exasperated crowd moved forward.

But all at once the Indian for ten minutes immovable threw up his hands and thrust two revolvers into the faces of all.

He said not a word but the crowd understood, knew that another step forward would open two dread batteries of steel.

"Come!" said Flash Dan from the door and the Klamath glided back.

He reached the threshold with his face still turned to the crowd and the next moment he was gone.

"They sha'n't git away in thet manner!" cried Big Bart. "I thought Bowie Bar war ter be a death-trap fer Flash Dan an' his Injun pard! Foller me! We'll win yet er die in our boots!"

With all the tiger in his nature aroused, the would-be avenger of Windy Rube started forward.

A wild yell cheered him on; the whole crowd was at his back, Faro Phil at his side.

He was the first to reach the door, the first to land in the lamplight that covered the ground outside, and the next second he fired at a stalwart figure scarcely twenty feet away.

A cry followed, and a man fell.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PLAYING THE DRAMA OUT.

THE man who dropped at the crack of Big Bart's revolver was not Flash Dan, but his Indian pard.

In another instant, however, the red-skin was again on his feet, and with a loud cry he sprang toward the crowd.

"Not your vengeance but mine," said the silver Nabob as he pushed the Klamath aside. "I'll shoot once anyhow for the banishment from Nugget City."

Flash Dan picked out the two Blades in an instant; they saw the Nabob as his deadly revolver scintillated in the starlight; they tried to cover him; but in vain!

Two shots followed in terrible succession, and the first victim scarcely beat the second to the ground.

"Halt whar ye ar', men ov Bowie Bar!" came over the Nevadian's smoking weapon. "On our part thar shall be no more blood shed ter-night. Don't follow us, though. I shoot when cornered as you've just seen," and the man laughed coolly.

Before the leveled weapons of Flash Dan and the Indian who now stood side by side the crowd had already halted.

"Give us the Injun an' we'll let you go," said one of the foremost members addressing the silver sport.

"Ask for my blood!" was the instant reply. "Help when I needed it has made that red-skin a part of my life. Ef you want 'im take 'im, Thar he stands!"

Yes, straight as an arrow in the starlight stood the Klamath, his long scalp-locks reaching to his shoulders, and in his hands the deadliest weapon an Indian had ever wielded—the silver-handled bowie.

But not a man moved toward him, not a single hand was thrust forward to secure him.

"Wal, ef ye don't want 'im, we'll take our departure," resumed Flash Dan after a few moments of silence.

The two friends moved back, but not a man attempted to follow.

The crowd seemed cowed, for none stepped over the two bodies lying almost side by side on the ground—the last of the Banded Blades to fall with their boots on.

A few yards from the last scenes Flash Dan and the Klamath were joined by two women.

"Whar is Nugget Ned?" asked the Nabob eagerly, as he caught sight of Myra.

"In the old cave. Windy Rube left him for dead in the mountain when he robbed him of the rifle with which he afterward covered you," was the answer.

"We'll hunt him up. I guess the drama ov Bowie Bar hez been played ter ther end. Thar war some tall actin', Myra. It warn't much ov a woman play, eh?"

The young girl smiled.

"You have given me a name," she said. "I have been Mountain Myra for I don't know how many years; but I know now that I am Myra Minturn, Lonely Jack's child. Flash Dan, the daughter of that devoted father thanks you."

"Oh, thet's all right, Myra," exclaimed the silver sport, looking down into the glistening eyes of the gold-camp waif. "I made up my mind thet I'd find ye—I told Lonely Jack so the last time I ever saw 'im, an' I got thar. Thank me, eh? No. Go an' thank thet Injun who found the locket, an' then told me thet thar war a girl at Bowie Bar who looked just like the picture in the locket." And leaving the girl the Nevadian went to Modoc Kate's side.

"You got thar, Kate," he said. "Windy Rube will never hang another boy."

"My boy—never!" cried the woman. "Ah! you have never asked me for my life's history."

"It warn't my bizness ter know," said Flash Dan. "You hev said that ther Tahoe Infant war yer child an' I know he war."

Modoc Kate was silent for a minute, and walked along with her eyes cast downward.

"Years ago I became the wife of Captain Seldon, a miner, who was killed by a rough two years after our marriage. I went at once on the path of vengeance, leaving my boy baby in the hands of the men in the camp near Lake Tahoe. I followed the base assassin across Colorado, but he eluded me for six months. When I struck his trail again, I followed it with the pertinacity of a sleuth-hound and reached it at the end of another six months."

"Found him at last?" ejaculated the bronzed listener.

"I did!" and under her black lashes the eyes of the Trigger Queen flashed with almost insane brilliance. "When I had completed my work, I made my way back to the camp eager to greet my boy, but I found the whole place in ruins, and with no one there to tell me where the people were. I felt that I was childless, and from that moment became a wanderer in the gold lands. The men of that camp seemed to have disappeared as effectually as if the solid earth had opened and swallowed them. Years passed away. I had almost given up hopes of ever seeing my boy again. The time came when I drifted to Bowie Bar, and there I met the lad called the Tahoe Infant. I felt that he was my child. Afterward the presence of a peculiar birth-mark on his arm confirmed my suspicions, but I did not reveal myself. I resolved to watch over him until he had reached a certain age, and until his mind, never very strong, had become wholly right. I waited too long. You know that as well as I do. He died before I could tell him all, but I held him in my arms and called him my lost baby as he gasped his last, killed by a villain's rope. But haven't I avenged him? Don't the white face that lies in yon whisky-den tell the story of Modoc Kate's death-shot for her boy? There! I've told you all, Flash Dan. I would do the same thing again. Modoc Kate has avenged the Tahoe Infant, and Myra whom he loved has planted mountain flowers on his grave."

The big Nevadian made no reply, and when Modoc Kate looked up she saw his heart in his eyes.

A little while later the cavern was reached by the entire party, and Nugget Ned was found ready to greet them all.

It was all over at last.

The drama of justice and revenge had been played through to the end, and the gold camp in the Sierra added suddenly to the little cemetery on the mountain-side.

A few months later the people who knew him were somewhat surprised to learn that Flash Dan had settled down to a retired existence in a beautiful residence on the outskirts of Virginia City, and that his wife was Modoc Kate, or, as the papers announcing the wedding had called her, "Mrs. Kate Seldon."

And in a house near by only a short time afterward a young couple began housekeeping after a very happy honeymoon, for Mountain Myra had become the wife of Nugget Ned!

At uncertain intervals there appears at Flash Dan's house a splendid specimen of the American Indian, and he always finds a hearty welcome awaiting him when he comes.

All Colorado knows him, the gold lands were once his home, and, although constant contact with the whites has tamed his spirit, his eye still flashes at the sign of an insult, and he carries still the silver-handled bowie which is as well known and feared as its red-skinned owner.

Bowie Bar is still a mining-camp on the Sierra Trail, but the old master-spirits have passed away, and the mountain grass covers the bones of Windy Rube and his Banded Blades.

Where they fell we drop the pen—the story told.

THE END.

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